



LESLIE  
KEITH.

M. J. Owens  
Cadnant Park.  
Conway



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PENANCE



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BY

LESLIE KEITH

*Author of*

"LISBETH," "THE INDIAN UNCLE," "THE MISCHIEF-MAKER,"  
ETC.

"Love and Repentance—are not they the great teachers?"

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## CHAPTER I

### THE ADVENT OF BEAUTY

IT was at Albany that she came on board the ss. *St. George*—the only passenger, which made her entry the more noticeable. Everybody looked at her: indeed, it would not have been possible to help looking, for she had that kind of beauty which makes its instant impression.

Rather tall, her slenderness adding to the appearance of height, she advanced with an air of smiling sovereignty: the admiration that instantly leapt to every man's eyes a tribute to which she appeared to be entirely accustomed. She wore a travelling costume of dark blue (a little too elaborate for the occasion), with a rustle suggestive of hidden silk; her hat shaded her eyes and gave them a fictitious depth; under its brim her hair shone pure gold—yellow gold, which Nature had graciously allowed her to keep unalloyed till this her twenty-seventh year.

Nature had indeed been very gracious to her. It gave her face its perfect oval, her eyes their gentian blue, her complexion its delicate shell-pink and milk-white, her nose its straight Greek line, her mouth its

curved bow. The one thing this bountiful bestower withheld it took most people some time to discover : men, perhaps naturally, longer than women. Certainly there was not on board a creature of the opposite sex who witnessed her arrival who did not instantly think her the prettiest woman—wife or sweetheart notwithstanding—whom he had ever seen. And here an exception is not even made of John Darnaway, who had neither wife nor sweetheart, and was not easily influenced by a woman's looks.

She had a large quantity of luggage, but it seemed quite right that she should carry nothing more cumbersome than the light wrap thrown across her arm. When she hesitated momentarily on the gangway a dozen hands were thrust out to help her.

"So much," said Miss Skelton, who was leaning over the rail with Mr. Roderick Rollo, "for a pretty face!"

Miss Skelton, who had joined the *St. George* at Melbourne, had hitherto been the most attractive woman on board ; but she knew that her day was over. She abdicated philosophically.

"By Jove!" said the little man, in an astonished tone, sucking in his breath. He, too, gave an involuntary start forward when the lady made that pause on the gangway.

"Too late!" said Miss Skelton, with a good-humoured laugh. "Never mind! I daresay she'll kindly make another occasion for your gallantry to-morrow."

Behind the procession of trunks, each with "L. S.,"

painted on its canvas in unblemished white, came, carried clumsily in a sailor's arms, a bundle which, when set down, resolved itself into a little girl of three, dressed in warm but scanty garments. Her hat, which had tumbled back and was only held round her neck by the elastic, left visible a small, round, snub-nosed face with eyes of light blue, and thin, fine flaxen hair. Not a pretty child, nor a child with any promise of prettiness to come. She stared about her rather frightenedly, her mouth trembling at the corners, ready to droop.

The owner of the boxes, who was talking smilingly to the Captain, suddenly turned round.

"Oh, there's my youngster!" she said, with a kind of gay tolerance. "She must go in my cabin, I suppose; but perhaps the stewardess——"

The rest was lost, but it was sympathetically understood by the onlookers that L. S. had the misfortune to travel without a nurse. There was nothing about the child, solemn, shy, and awkward, to make any of them sorry for *her*.

"Who is she?" was asked a great many times that evening in the smoke-room and elsewhere. Before another day closed the lady had very kindly answered the question herself.

Her name, indeed—Lilith Shore—was written in plain print on her deck-chair. She owned that she liked her pretty name, and always wrote it in full.

Rollo—the Hon. Roderick, third son of a new-made peer—a little red-haired man, tried vainly to chase some elusive suggestion the Christian name

recalled—some poet or painter chap had surely used it? Rollo lived in the hope of being epigrammatic, but this was clearly not the occasion. He could only say, feebly:

“It’s awfully pretty!”

“And you see,” she looked up at him, the pupils of her deep blue eyes expanding like flowers at dawn, “if I only wrote L., people might think my name was Lizzie or Lily.”

“Or Laura,” said Rollo, able to appreciate the depths of this possible catastrophe. “Got an aunt called Laura; reg’lar old cat!”

There was a seemingly charming frankness about her revelations. She made no secret of narrow means. “If I were rich I should not be here,” she said, with that little air of gentle retrospection which she carried about as part of her stage property. It was effective, because it left so much to one’s imagination. “Where would she have been?” one immediately asked, and one could not do less than build a fairy palace for so beautiful a princess. Her husband had gone out from the Old Country to take up land, and, failing at that, had tried many things—gold-digging among others. He had been dead about eighteen months. She and the child were on the way home to visit his father—a rector in Essex.

“Poverty that does not bar a pearl necklace must have its alleviations,” said Miss Skelton to her neighbour, John Darnaway, at table that evening. She was not an ill-natured woman, and did not go out of her way to say spiteful things; but there was no



cognate connection in her mind between a "struggle" and silk, jewellery and chiffon. "I hate humbug!" she said presently, with, perhaps, unnecessary force.

John Darnaway smiled. "All the same," he said quietly, "her story is perfectly true."

"You knew the man, then?"

"Scarcely that; but I've met him. He was a very good sort."

"Of course; the husband of such a wife always is 'a good sort.' The other kind look out for wives to adore *them*. Have you met her, too? She didn't honour you with a recognition."

"I never saw her before; but I've heard of her."

"I can believe that!" with light irony. She glanced up the table. Mrs. Shore sat in the place of honour—hitherto vacant—at the Captain's right hand, Mrs. Towers enjoying a sulky solitude upon his left. Owing to the departure of a passenger, Mr. Rollo was moved up one, and found himself (it was generally held, by superior cunning in bribery) at Beauty's side. He grinned triumphantly at Major Ainslie, who glared back over his wall of shirt-front in futile anger. Even the stout and nameless foreign gentleman, who had never been known to display interest in anything except his dinner, was seen to push his own particular bottle of sauce across the cloth, and to receive with evident satisfaction her gracious acknowledgment.

"What did he die of?" Miss Skelton presently asked, her mind still at work upon the late Mr. Shore.

"Never heard"

"Ah well! one can make an accurate guess! Why do you make me say all the spiteful things?"

"I?" he asked, in genuine amazement, his brown face a little browner.

"Yes, you. Don't you know you ultra-charitable people always rouse the uncharity in others? You goad us on to try if we can't make you sin along with us. Don't look so tragic! Don't you know me by this time? Seven days at sea should count for seven years on land. Look what *one* day has done in that quarter!"

"I shall begin to think," he said—then paused in embarrassment at his own temerity. He was dreadfully unused to women.

"Don't hesitate," she laughed. "That I'm jealous, you would say? In other words—I'm a woman, and I don't like even such a poor little bit of conquered territory as the Hon. Roderick to be filched from under my nose without so much as an 'if you please'! But at least my penetration has been rewarded in making a friend of you, for I fancy we shall be left to console each other in an arctic seclusion."

She was thirty, and permitted herself to say anything she liked.

"You needn't be an outsider unless by your own choice," he said, with conviction.

"Possibly!" she drew down the corners of her mobile mouth; "but—when there are only the women left to herd with!"

He had humour enough to perceive his use.

"Then I've the good fortune to be better than nothing?"

"Yes," she laughed. "What a thing it is to find a man who knows his own place! You are better than nothing, and I mean to keep you to myself. Those tentacles shall not reach your length. Isn't that an appropriate sea-simile?"

"You must take care of me. I shouldn't recognise a tentacle if I saw it coming across the table—we don't grow them in the scrub."

"None of you do recognise them, you poor things, until they are so well wrapped round you that you can't break loose! I'll take care of you!"

He could not but be amused, and perhaps, being a man, a little flattered. He was quite unused to society, and was by nature exclusive. On board the *St. George* he had been allowed to feel his isolation. The women agreed that he looked "distinguished" but unapproachable; he smoked very little, and so missed his chance of intimacies over a pipe. The Amusement Committee scarcely approached him: by his own avowal he was not musical; he didn't recite; one had only to look at him to feel assured that he could neither thump on a banjo nor thrum on a jew's-harp. He told himself he was lucky to be let alone; but the loneliness of a crowd is nothing to the loneliness of isolation on ship-board, and when Miss Skelton, who was well off, lively, good-tempered, and a favourite, made advances on the third day, he found himself almost grateful. He had penetration enough to

know that she was better than she seemed. She had put on the manners of her day; but they were, like her sheath skirt, a merely temporary fashion, and the heart beneath remained uninfluenced by them.

He might have had proof of this if he had been able to follow her to the ladies' cabin, where she went after the meal was over. There was to be a concert later on, but for the moment most of the passengers were on deck. One or two couples paced up and down and held converse in low tones; young Bell was displaying the native knives and boomerangs he had bought at Albany to the two Miss Mastertons; but the group which caught John Darnaway's eye as he stood aloof was one which consisted of a lady in a light dress surrounded by six or eight black coats. Miss Skelton was, however, not at his side to make incisive comment; she was at the moment talking to the stewardess at the door of a cabin not far from her own. Both berths were littered with clothing; on the sofa opposite, the pale little girl, of whom she had had but a glimpse the day before, lay fast asleep.

"How still she is!" she commented. In sleep the child had a curious, faint, washed-out likeness to the mother—a blurred copy of a fine original.

"She do seem a quiet-like little thing, m'm. She'll set here and play all day as still as a mouse with that doll she's nursing of this minute—and never a sound above her breath."

"You'll not find her much trouble."

"Bless her little heart, no!" said the stewardess,



who was a good soul ; "but being, as you may say, the only first-class child——"

Miss Skelton laughed. "Smuggle her over among the second-class children," she advised. "There are plenty of merry grigs there. It will do her good, and —she'll never be missed."

But the stewardess shook a dubious head, though she stooped tenderly enough to tuck in a stray corner of the blanket. "I couldn't do that, ma'am, not without horders ; but the little lady don't seem used to company, so maybe she won't miss it."

"Oh, well," said Miss Skelton, with a sudden impatient toss of her head as she caught up her draperies, "if you want something to amuse her with you can come to me. There's a parcel of toys lumbering up my cabin which I was weak enough to buy at the last moment. My nephews and nieces don't want them any more than I do, so this small girl may as well have the benefit."

"Now, what in the name of goodness possessed me to notice *that* woman's child?" she asked herself whimsically, as she went upstairs again with the silk shawl which had been her excuse for descending. "I, who am by no means a maternal person, and not even a 'fond aunt'!—except that I feel sure she is like her father, poor scrap, and anybody might pity him."

As she set foot on deck, the wailing protest of a violin in process of being tuned reached her ear, and she turned aside with a quick movement from the music-room and, catching up her train, crossed the

deck. The electric light made a brilliant day of its spaces: a garish day upon which the immemorial stars looked down in remote majesty. There was a cool wind—enough to ripple though not to perturb the sea, and one side of the deck was protected by an awning. Several of the passengers still lounged there, though sounds of unmistakable invitation issued from the concert-makers. Mrs. Shore's chair had now six chairs surrounding it; she was being besought to sing by Major Ainslie, who assured her, on authority, that every angel was the possessor of an exquisite voice.

Rollo, who seemed to be rather out of it, superfluously created a breeze with the feather fan he took from her lap; the fat foreign gentleman, who was rolling cigarettes, offered her his case.

Miss Skelton skirted this group and fell upon another, consisting of three matronly ladies seated in a row. One of these put out a hand and detained her.

"Isn't it disgraceful?" she said in a vigorous whisper. "The creature is actually smoking with all those men, and that *child*, Harry Bowen, who ought to be at his lessons, sitting at her feet! It's sickening!"

"Such a bad example for the girls!" said No. 2 plaintively.

"I think the Captain ought to interfere," No. 3 remarked, with offence. "If this is the sort of thing one may expect on ship-board——"

"Oh, I assure you one may encounter it on shore,

too. It's a very representative group," said Miss Skelton, lightly. "And besides," she added, with relenting good nature, "if one were so *very* pretty, one might perhaps look at the thing from the other side."

"There is only one side to morality," said the first speaker grimly; and Miss Skelton, feeling herself unable to continue the conversation on these lines, fled with a laugh.

"I thought you were among the music people," John Darnaway said, meeting her in the dusk beyond the glare of the electric lights.

"Don't say your wish fathered that thought," she retorted lightly, "for I'd rather be here. The violin, as it is interpreted by Miss Le Strange, doesn't allure me."

"A good many seem to be of your mind," he glanced back over his shoulder.

"Not so many. Mrs. Shore is the nucleus of that little crowd of black coats; naturally she doesn't care for any performance which would reduce admiration to looks. The dark blot against the awning is a jury of British matrons sitting in judgment. It is as I told you. The careless mothers and indifferent wives have already condemned Beauty: the good ones will follow suit to-morrow, and on Wednesday there won't be a woman on the *St. George* who will speak to her."

"Except you."

"And why, pray, except me?"

"Oh, you don't want a reason!" he said easily.

"But I do. I like reasons," she protested. She

liked, however, still better his trust in her, and she did not press him.

They stood for a minute or two side by side, silently looking down upon the little waves that came for an instant within the circle of light thrown from the port-holes and then flowed on into the night.

“What a hateful little epitome of a hateful world we are, swung here between two immensities!” she said presently. “I wonder the sea doesn’t rise up and swallow us, or the stars go out for very shame with gazing on us! One might think that here, if anywhere, with one unpathed mystery over our heads and another under our feet, we might turn our backs for a while on the flesh and the devil and think of something beyond our own abominable vanities and vexations; but we don’t, we don’t! The sea air nourishes our bad qualities, I think, and I can speak with authority, for I’ve done this voyage four times. If I were asked what is an inevitable part of every steamer’s cargo, I should say: ‘envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness’!”

“And pleasant acquaintanceships and kindly friendships, don’t forget these!” he said in his steady voice. “I’m not good at analysis, or that sort of thing; but I fancy human nature is pretty much the same mixture of good and bad on sea as on land.”

“Oh, no! It suffers a ‘sea change’ the second day out!”

“Well, then, you can turn your back on it.”

“*You* can,” she laughed lightly. “If I hadn’t

trotted out that mutual friend of ours at Melbourne as a kind of chaperon, you would still have been offering *me* a distant shoulder."

"That kindly impulse of yours is one good deed I owe the sea," he said pleasantly, "and you were moved to it on the second day out!"

"The third," she corrected, with a woman's quicker memory. "*Was* I really kind, I wonder? You seemed so content with your solitude, I sometimes think I ought to have left you to the uninterrupted enjoyment of it."

"You don't think that—you can't think it!" he protested. "One gets solitude enough in the bush; it grows into a kind of bad habit, and, like other bad habits, it takes a bit of an effort to break with it. And the sea is a little like the bush in the feeling it gives you of being in the middle of space without limit."

"If one were on a very small desert island, perhaps; but scarcely within hearing of Mr. Rollo's banjo. When it begins, 'What an afternoon!' I feel the world a great deal too little. I daresay one could get back the sense of its bigness in the bush, with only the sheep for company. Sheep are discreet beasts: they don't force their little accomplishments upon an unwilling spectator, and there are only two of them to an acre, aren't there?"

"Theoretically, yes; but they don't distribute themselves with mathematical precision," he laughed.

"No; being sheep, they naturally all crowd into one acre, and leave you undisturbed possession of the rest."

She led him skilfully on to speak of his past life, though indeed there were few particulars in his uneventful career that she had not already gleaned.

She had taken note of him from the first hour, and felt sure that she should like him. He was not in the least handsome, but his plainness did not prevent him from looking both manly and distinguished ; though he made no claim to an exalted pedigree.

"There must be good blood in him," she thought ; but if there were, it was considerably watered. His bearing was due rather, like his bronzed complexion, to the open-air life he had led since, as a lad of eighteen, he had left Scotland to make his venture in Australia. He was now, as she judged, about thirty-eight, and that left twenty years for the accumulation of what she understood—though not from him—to be a very comfortable fortune. She knew also—though again not from him—that it had not been acquired without the exercise of plenty of pluck, perseverance and common-sense.

His capital was so small, that the whole of it was risked in his first venture. It just served to charter a waggon and team, and to stock the former with flour, biscuits, tea and other groceries, hardware, crockery—everything, in short, that his own shrewdness and the experience of others told him the squatter, remote from shops, would be likely to buy. Disposing of these as he went inland, he loaded up for the return journey to the coast with hides destined for shipment abroad, and so made the first of innumerable journeys which, as time went on, were



increasingly successful. By the time the railways had so multiplied as to cut the ground from under him, he had already laid by enough to make retirement easy. This sum he invested in a sheep-station, and for the last five years he had been joint owner in a flourishing run that brought in an excellent return for capital.

"It was chiefly luck," he said modestly, "and the hitting of the right line to start with. I should be nowhere if I had to begin now."

"I shall begin to have a new respect for Carter, Paterson and Pickford," she said gaily, wrapping an end of her shawl round her throat. "Hitherto they have been mere convenient abstractions for the conveying of one's parcels cheaply; now I shall think of them as millionaires, surveying the world at their ease."

"But not from their own waggon shafts, like me!"

"Oh, you—you have left the waggon shaft behind! And yet it must have been a delightful way of travel, and what chances it gave of studying the 'all sorts and conditions' that make up life! It was on one of those up-country expeditions you first met your romantic friend, Mr. Carmichael, wasn't it?"

"Why romantic?" he asked, somehow misliking the adjective.

"Oh, because he chose you as the guardian of his child! You must have been a mere boy!"

"Well, as it's seventeen years since poor old Jim died, I suppose I was rather juvenile; but you see my guardianship has been merely in name.

Carmichael wanted his girl educated in Scotland, so I sent her to my sister-in-law, who has looked after her ever since."

"And now you are going to see her."

"To see the old country," he corrected, his thoughts going out not to Hēla Carmichael at all, but to the mother soil, dear to every wandering Scot. To set foot once again on the birthland, and inhale the air of home—is not this the one sustaining dream of his exile?

"It's the first holiday—to call a holiday—I've had for twenty years," he said, his chest expanding as if his lungs already responded to the breath of the North. "And," he laughed half shame-facedly, "I've been counting on it like any schoolboy!"

She looked up into the lean brown face, its kindly eyes now alight with the fires of patriotism, and after a moment she said very softly, very kindly:

"I hope it will be a happy one!"

## CHAPTER II

### "THE LIGHT BABBLE OF LIFE"

THE pair of friends now found themselves day by day in each other's company. The little colony on board—a floating section of "society"—easily classified them as lovers, and showed a disposition to isolate them in dark corners of the upper deck. But they were all wrong. The woman, indeed, was interested in her companion, which may be said to be the first step towards a closer bond ; but then, she had taken the trouble to bore through his shell of reserve, which constituted him in some degree her lawful and peculiar property. The man, on his side, was amused by and grateful for her comradeship ; but if gratitude opens the gate, it by no means always leads to the inner chamber of love.

He had been born with and had managed to retain—chiefly, perhaps, by reason of consorting so much with sheep—a guileless reverence for woman as an abstract being. All the talk about the equality of the sexes left him in the belief that woman was the superior—a "much better sort of chap than man." That was his delightful way of disposing of a burning question. If other men used their womenkind as

doormats, Darnaway put his few feminine acquaintances on pedestals. He had never had occasion to take one down yet. If they sometimes fell off and got dented, he never knew it. He did not get near enough to them for that, and they all liked him a great deal too well not to scramble back into their places when he came in sight.

But while his own warm-bloodedness helped him to understand the passions that moved the men he chanced upon in the bye-ways of life, when they wooed and thirsted for marriage, there had been no time in his own busy race for bread for any such thrilling experience. Love, swift of foot, had passed him by, nor had he any mind, now that he was at last at leisure, to go in pursuit of her. He was tired ; he wanted no throes and pangs ; he wanted to lie back in his chair and be amused by Miss Skelton, and watch the ways of his fellow-voyagers. After all, they were much more amusing than sheep.

The line had been crossed with the usual ceremonies, and the *St. George* was now heading for Colombo. Amusements were in full swing : committees, bustling with importance, met daily for consultation ; recruits were loudly claimed. Occasionally, in spite of their supposed pre-occupation, our pair found themselves drawn into the maelstrom. Mary Skelton proved herself a past-mistress in the art of carrying a potato in a spoon across the undulating deck. John Darnaway distinguished himself in a modest way at quoits.

"I thought you would join us," said Mr. Rollo,

possessing himself of Miss Skelton's spoon. At moments when Beauty had no smiles to spare, he wavered back to her side. "You don't know how jolly easy it is to make a fool of yourself until you try."

"Some people never have to try," she answered gravely.

The second class challenged the first to contests at cricket, and trooped over in a body to witness Harry Bowen's performance with the bones. The whole ship, except that disregarded portion of it to whom fell its safe guidance, gave itself over to light-hearted frivolity.

There were several promising flirtations between youths and maidens upon which the seniors smiled, and the progress of Mrs. Shore's conquests was watched by the other ladies with a jealous interest which she probably found flattering, since it was proof of her superior ability to attract. She at least spared no pains to make them as comprehensive as possible. Her beauty might have been weapon enough, but she did not rest on it; she was mistress of the art—or the craft—of being all things to all men, in a sense which the apostle certainly did not foresee when he wrote his pastoral.

"And nothing to any woman!" said Mary Skelton, lightly.

Darnaway wondered a little at the strength of her dislike. It even made him slightly uncomfortable. He did not feel much attracted by Mrs. Shore, but he still thought her very pretty. And he knew that

the average man—the Rollo or the Ainslie of life—does not admire a woman for her virtues.

“God has given her so much—with both hands—pressed down and running over, I suppose one ought not to wonder if He left the soul out.”

“Why do you hate each other so—you women?” he said, sitting up and turning his blue eyes on her. They were blue, though the rest of his face was walnut-coloured.

“Hate each other!” she said, vigorously; “that is man’s misconception.”

“And that,” he retorted, laughing, “is a woman’s answer!”

“What do you want me to say?” she remonstrated. “I suppose it is possible for me to be on friendly terms with the majority of my sex, and yet disapprove of a few individual specimens?”

“Theologians advise us to confine our disapproval to the sin.”

“That, no doubt, is why our friend the Bishop allows himself to be so very tender to—the sinner!” she said, with a flash of her brown eyes.

The Bishop, a returned Colonial, had only recently joined the circle on deck. He had hitherto lived on a diet of hard biscuit and soda-water in compulsory retirement in his cabin, and most of his frivolous congregation had forgotten his existence.

“What beasts he must have thought us, dancing over his head!” said young Harry Bowen.

“Never mind, Harry!” said his elderly friend and first love; “he’ll have his revenge on Sunday, when he preaches over ours.”

"Oh, I say, I shan't go!"

Mary Skelton shook a finger at him. "I'll make you, Harry! You used to obey me once, before you forsook me for another queen!"

By the side of that queen the Bishop was now seated, his apron and his buttons hidden under Mrs. Shore's opossum rug. She had plaintively insisted, and he had good humouredly yielded at last. She had on a very pretty frock, which perhaps she did not wish to cover up. He felt a little giddy still, but was sufficiently recovered from the buffetings of the sea to be glad of sunshine and society.

Miss Skelton considered him dispassionately. "How green he looks!"

"Is it a question of tentacles?" asked Darnaway, not troubling to take his eyes away from the sky as he lay back in his chair with his hands behind his head.

She did not answer. She had been thinking of the invalid's complexion, but now it flashed across her: "'Souls have their complexions too.' I wonder what colour his is? Shall I go and rescue him? He looks too good a little man to be twiddled round even the prettiest little fingers. Mine are not pretty;" she extended a pair of strong, capable hands, rather tanned with sun and sea, "but they're strong. It would be an errand of mercy to hold them out to him, only——"

"Only it would be deserting me," said Darnaway, who had brought his eyes down from the sky, and who had an odd, almost uncanny way at times, of reading another's thoughts,



"And she would get hold of you instead!" she said with energy. "No. I abandon him to his fate."

His fate was not an unkindly one. For the moment he was the favoured of all others, as he sat in a little island of sunshine at Beauty's side, looking on benignantly at the gambols of his temporary flock. Mrs. Shore never took part in the games; she did not care to do anything that disturbed a pretty pose, or was likely to do violence to a careful toilet. Besides, she was not good at games. The Bishop, naturally, was also a spectator, though Miss Skelton lived in the hope of seeing him try conclusions at hop, skip, and jump with Mr. Rollo.

"Only, his gaiters would give him an unfair advantage," she said.

The heat was now so great that the ladies blossomed out like June butterflies in gossamer stuffs, and the men threw aside tweeds for flannels, and, in the case of the younger and dandier portion, for silks. The ladies were all looking forward to Colombo. They had long been bereft of the opportunity of buying anything, and at Colombo, as every one knows, you get great bargains in precious stones.

Major Ainslie threw cold water on this feminine enthusiasm.

"You'll be clever if you can 'best' a Cingalese," he said. "They've graduated in cunning. We give them practice enough, Heaven knows!"

"All the same, one wants to try," said Mrs. North stoutly.

"And they look so ladylike!" Mrs. Archie Fowler chimed in. She had made the voyage before, and liked everybody to know it. "I bought some opals last time from a dear creature with his hair done up in a comb; but my husband wouldn't let me have them mounted, though I told him I didn't mind a bit about their being unlucky. It's *wrong* to be superstitious." She looked, with her head on one side, at the Bishop.

"Except when you've to pay for the settings," murmured Major Ainslie.

"Wrong and foolish," replied the Bishop firmly, answering the lady.

"And to love jewels when you are too poor to buy them!" sighed Mrs. Shore in his ear.

This time assent did not so immediately follow. The man inside the ecclesiastic was minded to make the obvious comment that she needed no adornment, but victory was not his. His tongue was rusty from disuse, and while he hesitated the moment passed.

"Besides, she wouldn't have believed him," said Miss Skelton, whose keen eyes missed nothing. "Even if St. Paul himself were to preach on Sunday on the proper limits of a woman's wardrobe, she would still wear her pearl necklace at dinner, and pray for additions to her jewel-case at Colombo. It's a fine thing to be a good hinter—in the right quarters. You shouldn't be too modest if you want anything very much."

"Do you recommend the plan from personal experience?" Darnaway asked.

"I can buy my own jewels," she fenced. "I, too, will brave superstition and chaffer for opals and 'sea-tears.' One shouldn't set up to be wiser than one's fellow-fools, and there *is* an unholy joy in matching wits and getting something for a halfpenny less than it is worth."

"That, I've been led to believe, is the attraction of the remnant at the Alarming Sacrifice Sale."

"Of course! Personally, I shouldn't give two-pence for a woman who didn't love a bargain and succeed in making it, too. And I wonder what right your sex has to criticise ours in this respect? What is successful trade but the skilful despoiling of a neighbour? Look at that little man over there. His father's fortune (and title) is the result of lucky gambling on the Stock Exchange. What do you think of that?"

"I think, dear lady, with all humility, that you are pleased to be very cynical."

"And I, dear sir, that you are very rude!"

"Have you made up your minds yet? Have you settled what you're going to do, you and Mr. Darn-away?" asked the eager young voice of Daisy North, as she paused that moment in front of them.

They both gazed at her in blank dismay; and then, with concealed relief, the woman's sharper wits found the clue.

"Oh, at the fancy ball, you mean? Dear no, not I, anyway. It will be time enough to recognise myself a fright when the hour strikes. But you, my child"—she looked up into the round, big-eyed

moon-face above her, and thought how fresh and unspoiled it looked—"you must go as your namesake, an ox-eye daisy!"

The girl flushed with pleasure. "But—how—" she stammered.

"Oh, you must trust to me," she nodded brightly. "I have an inspiration! A fringe of petals—I've some crinkly paper somewhere—I see it all. It will be our little secret, and we'll dare Mr. Darnaway to betray us!"

The child blushed, but looked at him confidently.

"I'm sure he won't!" she said.

"Wild horses won't draw it from me," he assured her seriously.

"As if there were any on board," mocked Miss Skelton, "except, indeed, Major Ainslie's 'Waler.'"

"And Teddy Carne's donkey," said literal Daisy. "Only a horse isn't a donkey."

"Not always," said Miss Skelton with equal gravity.

In the middle of all this froth of light talk and flirtation: in the middle of all the envy and the jealousy and the malice, under the glare of the electric light, almost within sound of the rustle of silk and the clink of glasses and the babel of tongues—a steerage passenger was incontinent enough to die.

They committed him to sea the next day off the Point de Galle, and within sight of the flat, green shores of Ceylon, the whole ship's company gathering silently to speed him on that last lonely voyage. And for that one hour, as the Bishop, in a voice that

grew manly in the measure it was moved, pronounced the immemorial words of hope and trust, their frivolity fell from them like a tattered garment ; their small backbitings and enmities dwindled to the vanishing point before this tremendous issue which each in turn must face. Upon their souls, fresh from the light babble of life, fell the shadow of God the Unvarying, the Unchangeable, into Whose awful presence had already passed this their brother ; one of their disregarded selves but yesterday : to-day remote from them beyond any measuring of hours or reckoning of time.

Going back gravefaced to his cabin, the Bishop met Mrs. Shore coming up to the sunny deck. She wore diaphanous white and looked like a cloud, her eyes a bit of blue heaven shining through. They had a new and strangely shrinking expression in them as they met his.

"Is it all over ?" she asked rather falteringly. "I couldn't come up. I can't bear such scenes. They—I haven't the courage. I went down to—to my child."

Straight from the sublimes of life and death to her shallowness. It was too great a step. It shook him, and the veil fell from his eyes. There was a great gravity of compassion in his voice as he said—

"It is all over. The sea soon hides its secrets. You will see nothing to disturb you on deck."

For that afternoon, at least, the spell held. There were no frolics on deck. By a tacit agreement the

nigger minstrels, who had looked forward joyously to blackening their faces and making a noise, postponed their performance. In the glow of their moved emotions, both the first and second cabins made a little collection among themselves for the widow, sitting stunned in that far-off other world of the steerage, where tragedy had stepped upon the boards while they were playing comedy. The suggestion came first from Mary Skelton, and Darnaway had never liked her better than when she made it; but she refused to carry the gathered hoard to the mourner.

"The Bishop will give it her," she said in that decided tone that settled the matter. "He will do it far better than I could. He's a good man."

She looked at Darnaway a trifle defiantly. The look said, "I've a right to change my opinion if I choose."

Mrs. Shore gave five shillings, but the sad smile with which she dropped it into Teddy Carne's little tambourine made it seem worth five pounds.

In the evening she sat beyond the radius of light, in a nook of the deck, looking very pensive, very charming, in a nest of white shawls, with a big red Japanese umbrella unfurled behind her, which the declining sun turned into flame. On her lap lay a finely bound copy of "The Imitation" of Thomas-à Kempis; but the Bishop, for whose edification, perhaps, she had pursued it through two cabin trunks and found it at last in a third, was not there to see.

Her heart beat as a step approached her. An urgency for his presence possessed her. Why? To set herself right with him : to reconquer his approval, which she was quick enough to realise she had forfeited. She wanted him to believe in her as a man in a beautiful woman, as a priest in a good one. And, though she had been afraid, she was not bad. She had been feeling very solemn and sad, and she had gone down to tell Lilla a Bible story. Was it her fault that the child had cried and refused to sit on her lap? Surely she was rather to be pitied as the mother of such a strange, uninteresting little thing.

If the Bishop would only come, what a sweet talk they might have! She liked to feel good, especially at night when it was dark, and you could hear the sea beat against the ship's side—so near—so near—only a plank between you and it.

That black ribbon round her waist was perhaps a mistake. (She threw "The Imitation" with a petulant movement on a chair near her, and covered it with a fold of her shawl.) And yet she had not worn it to propitiate him, but death—Death from whom she shrank in a passion of dread.

On such a night as this, life was so enchantingly lovely. The sea, like some god appeased by sacrifice, lay in absolute quietude, only the heave of its great heart to tell that it lived ; the day fading into dark with such lingering tenderness, the vault of heaven already sown with pale stars before the saffron fires of sunset were extinguished. No black pall of cloud



to remind you of that other power of darkness : only a melting from blue to grey, such as in country lanes keeps alive the tremble of music from little birds and the flutter of winged things loath to give up the joyous dance of day.

"Both hands, both!" she murmured, stretching them out with an involuntary movement of passion, as if in that gleaming horizon she saw the flaming fires of life, and longed to warm them at its glow.

"By all means!" sniggered the voice of Rollo in her ear. "Most chaps would think themselves awfully lucky to get hold of one—and keep it!"

He was empurpled with the birth throes of his compliment, and he laughed consciously as he groped for the chair at her side.

She gave a start, and swept the book from it. Her voice was shrill and strained, but with a high note of relief in it, as she laughed too.

"Oh, how kind of you to come and cheer me!" she said. "I was so lonely; I believe I was foolish enough to talk to myself. I thought everybody had forsaken me."

Here was another occasion for gallantry; but Rollo could not rise to the height of two compliments in one night. He proffered his cigarette case instead.

"Awfully jolly here, isn't it?" he said, as he crossed his little legs and buttoned the tartan splendours of his smoking-jacket across his meagre chest. "The sea is like glass."

The Bishop was right: the deep hides its secrets

well. And as she talked and laughed, and soothed her thrilled nerves with delicate inhalations of smoke, the shallow tide flowed over her soul once more, and the pool, where for one brief moment the ripples had broken, was stilled.

## CHAPTER III

### LILLA'S HOUR

THE ball was a thing of glorified memory : the fiery passage of the Red Sea a nightmare left behind ; and of Naples there remained but a misleading vision of white purity set on a plateau of blue, and a memory of evil smells.

Stay ! One must not forget a necklace of pink coral, which Mrs. Shore put carefully away beside a little packet of uncut sapphires.

The Bishop had landed at Naples ; he slipped modestly into the boat, disclaiming any share in the robust chorus of " For he's a jolly good fellow," with which the second saloon were sending off a favourite ; but several passengers, and among them Mary Skelton, sped him with friendly goodbyes, and one poor shrinking figure in the steerage strained eyes swelled with weeping and blurred with yet more tears to see him go.

" He's a bigger man than I thought," Mary Skelton said, as she shook him warmly by the hand.

In stature he was small (though Nature had not done him the further injustice of making him fat) ; but, happily, there is a kind of bigness that is independent of the physical mould a man is cast in

With that exception, the little party remained unbroken ; and now the talk on every lip was of "Home." There is surely no other race in the world which travels willingly so far, and yet comes back so eagerly.

Darnaway caught the general infection. He had been longer exiled than any man or woman on board, and, perhaps, to none was this homecoming so much as it was to him. Not even to his confidante could he explain the strength of his desire, or the measure of his anticipation.

She was English, but the thought of England left him lukewarm : it was the name of Scotland, even as he spoke it to himself under his breath, that fired his blood and made him ask himself in amaze how he could have forsaken it all these years.

"You all do it !" said she to whom he made his confession. "Oh, yes ! you are patriots—red-hot, rank patriots out of your own country ; but when you revisit it you are careful to take a return ticket ! you leave the door of escape open behind you. You love Scotland too well to live in it. You, for instance ; you are giving yourself a year."

He was convicted, but said boldly :

"Perhaps not !"

"Wait," she said ; "wait a bit and see. Oh, I don't mean that you couldn't have a very good time ! With your money, that shouldn't be difficult. You'll be quite in the van."

"I ought at least to feel at home there."

She laughed.

"But you won't be content. You'll want to increase your store. You people who are the architects of your own fortunes, as they say in biographies, never know how to stop building. On the whole, of the two ways of living, it is certainly pleasanter to inherit other people's earnings : you've no conscience about increasing them, and no scruple about spending them."

"I can assure you," he said lightly, "I've no particular turn for playing either miser or millionaire. And of all fools, he seems to me the biggest who wastes his days in storing up hoards for other people to squander."

"I'm glad my grandfather didn't share that sentiment: or where should I be now? He had quite the best kind of temperament for the founder of a family. He might almost"—she looked at him with the corner of her eye—"have been Scotch, his sense of his duty to posterity was so keen. But you, now—if you don't find any disenchantment in Scotland—and there's always the possibility—or feel any impulse to return to your mutton, there are still conceivable reasons why you should run back."

"Such as?"—he said, lazily, letting her guide the talk as she would, but remaining unconvinced by her logic.

"To escape your ward, for instance."

It was not the first time she had—quite unnecessarily, as he thought—brought his ward into the talk, and never without causing him a certain vague annoyance. It almost seemed to him that she spoke of the young,

unknown girl as she spoke of the hardened woman of the world who used her beauty to twist men's hearts round her slender fingers and break them with a smile. Little as he had ever thought of Hēla Carmichael, or troubled himself about her, he could not brook that comparison. But he only said :

"As it happens, she has run away from me. She is with her mother's people in Germany."

"And you don't approve?" she said, her quick wit leaping to that conclusion.

"It is no business of mine," he said coldly. "If Carmichael thought his wife's people behaved badly to her, Hēla has never, that I know of, been told so. Besides, she is old enough to judge for herself, and too young to pick up a dead man's quarrel."

"H—m! — German *Schwärmerei* grafted upon Scotch scrupulosity. It sounds an odd mixture doesn't it?"

"It sounds abominable!"

"Oh, I shouldn't be unhopeful! You'll manage. Sentiment will correct solemnity, or *vice versâ*. She is twenty, isn't she?"

"Twenty."

"And pretty?"

"I don't know."

"Impossible! If she hasn't let you understand so much herself, your sister-in-law must have told you."

"Now that I think of it, my sister-in-law has moralised in her letters on the responsibility of good looks, and there have been mysterious hints of 'attentions,'"

"Oh, if there are lovers, she must certainly be pretty. But haven't you a photograph?"

"No. I don't think she has ever been photographed. Mrs. Andrew Darnaway would think that an unwise concession to vanity."

"That settles it!" she said gaily. "If she had been a plain girl she would most certainly have been photographed, in spite of the Auntie, and as certainly have smuggled a copy to you! Plain women are the support of the photographer. There's always the hope that he will be kinder to them than Nature has been, to justify the expense. Young, pretty, and beloved of the Scotch minister (your sister-in-law is sure to have a weakness for ministers) and the German student—(*he won't be a *candidat* though!*). Oh, I don't envy you your guardianship. You will certainly run away!"

Just as he was beginning to wish her in any other than her present mood, interruption came in an unexpected form.

There was a keen little wind from the east, enough to mount a white horse atop of each crisp wave, and leave the horizon coldly pale and clear. It was sufficiently fresh to make shelter desirable, and they had found this at the top of the cabin stairs, where the upper deck jutted a roof over them. So gaily had she held the talk, that neither heard the light fall of little feet, laboriously climbing the cabin stair, step by step, and neither was aware of any presence until a lurch of the ship sent the youngest of its passengers stumblingly against Darnaway's leg. The



appearance of Mrs. Shore's child on deck was so rare a sight that, in common with everybody else on board, they had nearly forgotten her existence.

The quaint, mouse-like creature, indeed, exacted nothing of anyone, and so silently effaced herself that it was small blame even to the kindest hearts that she should slip out of recollection. She attached herself to the stewardess, who was attentive to her at convenient moments, and at others left her to play alone, confident that no harm could come to a child so evidently nurtured to solitude. With this friend she generally spent the dinner-hour on deck, and it must have been some access of loneliness flooding her little soul, and stronger than her shyness, that made her now adventure there by herself.

Darnaway put out a protecting hand, and then, after a moment's hesitation, lifted the child to his knee. She shrank from him, but made no strong resistance, and, once established, gathered confidence to gaze about her solemnly.

He did not know that he was fond of children, but, when he had got over the momentary awkwardness, he rather liked the feeling of that light little burden. She was so small and so still.

Miss Skelton pulled the child's skirts to rights, but they would not cover her little rubbed shoes. She made a tent of her red parasol over the flaxen head.

"How very domestic we look!" she said. "But it was clever of you. You've made our expulsion from that charmed circle final."

For an ordinarily intelligent man, he was slow to follow her.

With the faintest little movement of her parasol, she indicated Mrs. Shore, seated, wrapped in furs, a little way off: a queen in the middle of her courtiers.

"Don't you see she hates anyone to notice *la petite*? It throws an electric light on her own neglect."

"She doesn't—beat it?" his own pulses began to leap.

"Dear no!" she spoke rapidly in French. "She never wanted it: she hates the bother of it even too much to pose as a mother. She can foresee in a certain way that it may be a hindrance to her plans; but she is too self-indulgent to be cruel."

Darnaway, with a blundering impulse to do something with his own emotions, took out his watch and spun it awkwardly on its chain.

"Oh, it's past the age for 'tick, tick!'" she mocked. "You'll ruin your watch if you make a spit of it."

"Is she so very ancient?" he laughed, as he restored the watch to his pocket.

"Old enough to enjoy adorning her little person. My bracelet will do better. See, baby, look at this pretty thing!"

But the child drew back from the gold circlet she made offer of.

"Not allowed to touch mamma's precious trinkets," she commented shrewdly. "Come, tell it a story!"

"I couldn't!" he protested with dismay.

"*I* could," she laughed; "but your modesty is contagious. Can't you remember any nursery jingles?"

He searched his memory in vain, and gave it up in a shamefaced way.

She looked at him with frank sympathy in her bright brown eyes. She knew all about him now, and realised how little of that delightful nonsense had entered into his own austere childhood. She looked from his face to the child he held with a stiff kind of steadiness, the unaccustomedness of a man to whom the experience was very foreign, as if he feared to break some spell by making a movement.

Her glance encompassed both with a swift compassion that altered and softened her keen face.

"Oh, you poor things, how much you have missed!" she said. "Here, give her to me, give her to me! You don't know how to hold her. You're as afraid of her as if she were—dynamite."

"I'm not!" he protested. "She's very jolly. Aren't you, little person?"

"Her name is Lilla," she said, impatiently.

"Very well, then. Look here, Lilla, this lady is aspersing us both."

"You'll frighten her with your long words. And I'm only finding fault with *you*."

"You want her to say she's uncomfortable, and she won't because she isn't."

"Because she's afraid."

"Not a bit. She doesn't want to go to you. She wouldn't have your bracelet."

"She equally scorned your watch."

They both laughed. The child looked from one to the other with a gaze that never warmed into interest nor wavered from a kind of subdued wonder and perplexity to find herself there, being made much of and squabbled over by two strange people. Her little life, with its brief memory scarce reaching back to yesterday, found no parallel to the situation; but she had the instinct which dogs, of all the under world, alone share with children, of knowing whom she could trust. The red parasol made a shelter from all that might have disturbed her infantine mind, and within its glow it was well with her little heart.

For a moment or two they sparred lightly, and then she said, with a softening of her voice that made it almost beseeching—

"Oh, but I do want her!"

"You shall have her," he said, conquered at once.

"If she will come," she said uncertainly.

It was as if something far weightier hung upon the issue than the light victory of her will over his. Was it her own character—her right to a tenderness deep underlying her surface cynicism—she was vindicating to herself—to him?

He watched her with an odd sense of suspense as she held out both hands and said—

"Come, Lilla."

The child hesitated, her pale eyes large, wriggled uncertainly upon Darnaway's knee, then slowly, but with gathering confidence, her hands went out to meet those other hands.

Miss Skelton looked up at her companion with a smile that was not triumphant but tremulous, but she said lightly—

“There, now, Lilla, you shall come under my plaidie and keep your toes and your nose warm, and if you are both *very* good I will tell you a story.”

For the next hour she amazed him with the powers of her memory, or was it her invention? He shrewdly suspected that she had the skill at least to embroider if not to spin the fabric of her tales. Songs, stories, nonsense rhymes, how generously she drew forth from her deep stores!

Suddenly memory slid back one of her doors, and he saw himself in a flash with another little child in his arms. In a moment it all came back—the piteous eagerness of Jim Carmichael’s face, white against the dingy pillow, the tossed clothes flung back from his chest that his laboured breath might gasp out unimpeded.

“Look after the kiddie, old man! Send her to Scotland—my sister may take to her: but if not—there’s only you.”

And then the companion picture of himself, in fulfilment of this reluctantly accepted trust, carrying on board a homeward-bound steamer a little girl who struggled and resisted and finally sobbed herself into a piteous, uncomforted sleep. What a dumb, helpless idiot he had felt! Seventeen years ago, and he could remember it still. Did Hēla remember it too? He smiled to himself for the folly of the thought, then wondered if she was still as wild and

wilful as the little creature who drummed with both angry feet on his chest, and made clutches with her baby hands at his hair. A different child, indeed, from this still, small listener, to whom an enchanted world had of a sudden opened.

"I flatter myself that was a new variant of the Cinderella myth," said Miss Skelton reproachfully; "and you look as tragic as if I had just been killing off the last of Bluebeard's wives."

"Please go on," he said, "and I'll be careful to laugh at the right place. If you're afraid that, being Scotch, I sha'n't know when we come to it, you might just preface your sentence by saying, 'This is a joke.'"

The spirited narrator had not to reproach him again, as she unfolded wonder after wonder.

When Lilla, carried away beyond herself by the immense experience, broke into subdued murmurs of pleasure, they exchanged glances of triumph; her little voice made no stir, and could scarcely be heard above the wash of sea or throb of engine, certainly never reached the throne on the other side of the deck; but it moved and pleased them both to think that it was they who had opened the doors of her sad little world and made her free for one hour of the children's kingdom.

As for his companion, he saw her in a new light that pleased him, simple and old-fashioned as he was, with his profound belief in the motherliness of all good women. For the moment, at least, she cast aside her affected cynicism and allowed her heart to

peak, cuddling the little one close to her, forgetting to throw so much as one look round the shelter of the parasol to see whether the real mother observed the little comedy.

Yet afterwards, when that blissful hour was over for Lilla, and the stewardess had sought and claimed her with propitiatory promises of pudding for supper (since the gentry seemed suddenly resolved to notice her), when Lilla was asleep in her quiet corner, Miss Skelton appeared at table with every trace of that transfiguring motherliness effaced from her countenance, with the old satirical glitter re-established in her eye, the old lines of tolerant contempt about her mouth.

Perhaps it was the vapid irrationality of the talk that buzzed all round her, perhaps the spectacle of Mrs. Shore's latest gown and jewellery, of Mrs. North's wrath, and Mrs. Archie Fowler's envy, or, it may be, of Mr. Rollo's interesting attempt to eat an apple which Miss Kitty Masterton twirled by a string—but Darnaway found her steel-clad.

Later, when, out of habit that seemed ancient now, they paced the deck under the scarcely visible stars, the wind having of a sudden completely died away, she said abruptly, after a silence :

"That unfortunate scrap! I'm not often so effusive."

"Don't," he said, his fastidiousness displeased.

"Don't you know I'm going to 'fess'?" she said, rather sharply, "though why I should be moved to confide in *you* I don't know. I did it at first to annoy the mother. There are some people whom it's a perfect luxury to dislike. I had the most rapturous



desire to shame her before all those fools. Did you notice how the thing-y was dressed?"

"No."

"Oh, you wouldn't. You men see nothing. But ask a woman, *any* woman, and then—look at *her*. Oh, you don't need to tell me what 'poor dear Charlie' died of. Yes. I began by wanting to affront her, and then—afterwards——"

She paused, but he understood.

"Well," she said with less strain, "I'm not particularly good, that I know of, and I don't often repent me of my sins; but I wish I hadn't forgotten that small thing so long, and I'd like to be good to her for the little bit of time that is left."

Vain resolve. The passengers woke next day to a mist, white at first and vaporous, such as any breath of air might disperse. But in the dead calm through which the steamer forged ahead it clung, and as the day wore on it thickened and grew in woolly density, closing in stealthily about the ship till half the deck's length was all the strained vision could see.

In the minds of all every thought was effaced save of the present clammy discomfort and the eeriness of that strange isolation in which nature had wrapped them. Then, set to the dismal music of the fog-horn, came trooping fears. Behind that mystery of whiteness what dangers might not lurk?

In the middle of the excitement, the conjectures, the condolences, the encouragements, not even her benefactors remembered little Lilla Shore at mouse-like play in her quiet corner, the only one of them all who remained in tranquil innocence of fear.

## CHAPTER IV

ALAS !

THE following morning the vaporous fleece showed signs of shrinking and dividing, a reddish haze declaring the sun's presence behind, ready to penetrate by the first crack and drink up the clinging moisture.

In this contest between the antagonistic elements of fire and water, the spirits of the passengers were on the side of the sun ; they counted on it confidently to do its work. Fog, asserted the weather-wise, rarely lasted more than twenty-four hours in the Channel, and to this the officers, relaxing the modern rule which forbade them to hold communication with the passengers, gave a cheerful assent.

In the rebound from fear, life glowed again for the idlers ; the possibility of danger, removed from immediate sight, became a matter for serene contemplation, for philosophical disquisition. In the smoke-room the men brought out their stored experiences, personal or vicarious, of sea-tragedies. There was a kind of exhilaration in talking of these when every knot left behind brought one nearer to the prosaic security of dry land.

To keep their spirits at the pitch to which this spectral glow behind the fog had raised them, all flocked to the saloon, the deck being impossible ; and there such games as could be played round a table were instituted. The poets of the company, hitherto blushing unknown, had at last an opportunity of distinguishing themselves. More than one copy of sentimental verses was slipped from hand to hand under the guise of an exchanged town or country address. It was the last day ; fluttering sighs and anticipating smiles, according to the temperament, greeted the recollection ; to-morrow the four corners of the kingdom would receive them, and this spell of life upon the seas would recede for each into its place among memories. At least let the closing hours be jolly !

The few who ventured on deck before dinner—among them being John Darnaway—saw that the beleaguering fog had again drawn close ; the sun's efforts to break through had been unavailing, and with its downgoing the impalpable vapour was again all-conquering. In stealthy, measured glide it flowed, wave upon wave, a sea in all but its insupportable silence. The sailors, bulky with oilskins, loomed through it ghostily large ; everything within the feeble circle of artificial light glistened with the heavy moisture ; in two minutes the fine spray searched through thin dress clothes, and rendered limp the most immaculate shirt-front. To draw a clean breath was impossible ; the fog clutched the throat with an invisible hand, as if it purposed to squeeze the life

out ; the baffling eeriness of it all, the utter inability to grapple with this unseen enemy, induced a sense of helplessness which to the landsman, at least, seemed almost insupportable. But the sailors, well-disciplined, cheerful fellows, worked as unconcernedly as if the stars were twinkling approval of their toil from the black hollows above.

The *St. George* was in careful, capable hands ; she crept on her way cautiously, her speed much diminished, into the jaws of the Channel, like a living thing that gropes with outspread hands in the dark, the intermittent moan of her syren a challenge to all who would obstruct her path.

The saloon seemed doubly brilliant by contrast. Use had staled the ear to that dismal note of warning ; the hope that nothing untoward would happen had grown to a certainty. On no face at the dinner-table was the outer gloom reflected. The spirits of all surged up after the temporary check, the sentiment of "the last night" still held good. The ladies had refrained from packing, that they might once more look charming in wonderful frocks ; lads and maidens, who had perfected themselves in the art of flirtation, used the latitude of the hour for yet tenderer approaches ; men and women, realising that across the desert of years the Land of Promise was at last in sight, spoke with a still quicker pulse of home. A new cordiality animated the group, a new tolerance which included even Lilith Shore and suffered Roderick Rollo ; invitations were exchanged, hopes of future meetings expressed ; in light jest and quip

and laugh the hour flew by, and not a soul guessed that it was telling out the moments of the doomed ship's life.

Perhaps no one could afterwards clearly formulate his or her feelings as the noble steamer, with a shiver as of premonition, crashed upon the unseen reef, and the grating shriek of rent timbers struck the light laughter dumb. Nature expresses herself in each of us in the language in which we have trained her ; in some hearts she will for ever play the sneak, in others she breeds an unguessed valour ; but we hide the secret of our training so well that only some great emergency reveals it. Character leapt to light in the faces of the men and women of the *St. George* as they recognised their peril ; but it is creditable to all to record that there was no overwhelming exhibition of cowardice. A scream or so from an hysterical woman, the wail of children torn suddenly from sleep, and after the first wild rush on deck was checked, order was evolved out of panic.

The impact was scarcely felt before the captain had signalled to the engineers below, and every man of the crew was at his post helping to launch the boats. The water was already forcing an entrance into the engine-room, threatening extinction to the fires ; but the vessel, still fast upon the reef, had not listed, and access to the cabins was still possible. Thus, with none of the worst features of danger pressed upon the notice, nerves steadied themselves, brains grew cool. Inspired by the manhood of officers and crew, the stronger of the male passengers

lent a hand in launching the boats ; others showed forethought by fetching life-belts, wraps, and portable valuables from the cabins. The women were not behind the men in self-possession, and bravest of them all was Mary Skelton.

A kind of exaltation, such as, in moments of great peril as in moments of great joy, lifts the mind out of the ordinary range of sensation, seized her ; her step was alert, her voice almost gay. She found her occupation chiefly among the bewildered, unstrung steerage passengers ; the terrified among the women she encouraged, the paralysed she roused ; babes and bundles she handled as if shipwreck were an everyday affair in her experience. So readily did she yield place, time after time, to one more helpless than herself, that it almost seemed as if she might carry personal indifference too far, and be left behind.

The stagnant obscurity heightened the difficulties of escape ; but, on the other hand, the perfect calmness of the sea inspired trust. With not a sound abroad but the wash of surf against rocks, it was difficult to realise the gravity of the danger ; the contagion of hope overcame the contagion of fear ; the immovable figure of the captain on the bridge, his deliberately issued orders, subtly conveyed the feeling that all would be rescued.

None but he, perhaps, realised what a very narrow margin of time was left for flight, though all worked with a resolute will. In the space of ten minutes two boats, containing the larger number of women and children, were safely launched ; into a third, hus-

bands, fathers, and brothers were now pressing. At the lowering of a fourth, Darnaway's muscle and strength were giving good help. Better progress was suddenly made possible, since the fog, with what seemed almost malicious caprice, was now lifting for the first time in forty-eight hours.

Almost in the instant that the grey curtain rose, the *St. George*, slipping from the rock, heeled to port, and slowly sank into deeper water. The time had now come for all left on board to look out for themselves. Darnaway sought and found Mary Skelton. Her eyes burned with excitement, but she was outwardly composed and cool.

"You've behaved like a brick," he said warmly ; "but you must come now. There isn't a minute to lose."

"All right !" she said, twisting up a slipping coil of her hair. "I won't hinder you."

He saw her passed downwards and seated in the stern of the port lifeboat, the last woman, as he reflected, with admiration of her pluck, to leave the wreck. He was preparing to follow her, but, casting an involuntary glance behind him, was amazed to see that she was not the last, after all. Standing unsteadily on the sloping deck—a frozen image of fear—he saw Mrs. Shore. He had but an instant's vision of her as she emerged from the whirling clouds of steam and mist, for she was promptly seized and lowered, half senseless, into the boat ; but it struck him even then how greatly her physical beauty was heightened and spiritualised by the blanching of her



face, the haunting terror of her great, wide eyes. A soul was born behind the mask at last, even if it were but a soul of fear. The white, flowing draperies of her dinner dress, seen through the grey, misty light, made her look singularly tall and imposing. She had apparently visited her cabin, for she clutched a bundle to her breast. Her child, of course. Even in that moment of conflicting emotions, the wonder went through him that she—whose courtiers had been so many—should now, in the hour of extremity, be forsaken of them all. He could only suppose that terror had kept her in paralysed uncertainty till the last instant, and so she had escaped notice.

His thoughts were still busy with her, when another figure came staggering out of the mist, and Rollo, wrapped in furs, and bending underneath the weight of a large valise, lurched against him with an oath.

“D—— you !” he screamed, “would you leave me to drown?”

Limp as a rag, shaking as if in an ague, he was tossed into the boat ; his valise, torn from him, was contemptuously kicked aside by one of the sailors, who muttered—

“He may be glad enough to save his precious skin !”

“Now you, sir,” he said, his tone re-gathering respect. There was but one seat left, and Darnaway took it.

In five minutes more every man aboard had quitted the *St. George*, and the boats were pulled

seawards for dear life. For scarcely had the last of them shot out from her side when, riven asunder by the pressure on her shattered frame, the steamer, with a tragic lift of her bows, plunged backwards into the sea. With a sound as of artillery, and jets of spouting steam shot skywards, her boilers exploded ; a moment later, and nothing but the floating fragments of wreckage and shattered timbers strewing the still sea were left to tell the tale of her tragedy.

In deep silence the rescued men and women watched the terrible spectacle ; then, when all was over, as if with one sigh of relief and one prayer of thanksgiving, the murmur went up—

“Thank God, we are all safe !”

Darnaway's eye sought Miss Skelton, and defined her presently through the gloom, huddled in the third mate's pea-jacket. His own teeth had an ado to keep from chattering, for he had given no thought to the provision of warm clothing, having, indeed, had no time to think of himself ; and his evening suit made a poor defence against the moisture-laden air, which chilled to the bone.

The general depression and misery, indeed, were such that, for some hours—while they paddled aimlessly, taking turns at the oars, some of their number keeping a watch for lights, their one effort to keep the boat headed for the open sea—no one uttered a word.

Their lives, indeed, were not forfeit, but most of them had lost much, and some few had bought

safety at the price of all they possessed. So the first hours of blackness wore away, and when the grey half-tones of day began to disperse the shadows, they found themselves out of the zone of the fog, but alone, as far as the eye could discern, upon the heaving plane of the sea. In the darkness they and the other boats had parted company. Behind them, but remote enough to seem but a darker band of leaden sky, lay land ; but what portion of the coast the sailor who pronounced most authoritatively could not tell.

The certainty, however, that they were within measurable distance of safe, solid earth, inspired courage. Even Rollo, whose groans and moans had alone broken the silence, as he lay huddled in the bottom of the boat, sat up and querulously demanded if nobody had brought anything to eat.

John Darnaway's position among the passengers gave him Mrs. Shore for a neighbour, and now, when for the first time he could rise beyond the pre-occupation of his own misery, he became conscious of hers. Though some good fellow went cold that she might be sheltered, she shivered and swayed as if the burden of her discomfort were too great to be borne. Darnaway turned to her with an impulse to be comforting.

"Courage !" he said ; "the worst is over. We'll soon be ashore now." He bent nearer her. "Let me take——" he began, then paused abruptly, looking fixedly at her, at the floor, the benches, searching the boat with puzzled eyes.

"The child," he said—"the little girl—she—she was with you, surely? Last night I saw her in your arms——"

She did not appear to listen, stooping listlessly forward, her hands round her knees, her body swaying back and forth.

He paused, beating back a horrible doubt.

"Perhaps—the stewardess——" he said thickly.

But some one in the stern called out—

"No, the first saloon stewardess went in the second boat, with a lady what had fainted. She had neither chick nor child with her."

The attention of all on board was now concentrated on Mrs. Shore. Even Rollo, hitherto absorbed in his own woes, lifted his head and stared at her with his light, expressionless eyes. Mary Skelton impulsively put out a hand as if to ward off a blow, but no one moved or spoke.

That awful, expectant silence that perhaps already judged and condemned her, seemed to carry the meaning of his question to her brain, and to rouse her from the stupor that all those hours had held her. Never, till his dying day, will Darnaway forget the face she turned upon him—pallid, drawn, her eyes wide with fear like those of a hunted creature at bay. From his they slowly travelled to the other faces, searched them one by one, and, finding sympathy in none of them, came back at last to his.

"I—I forgot her," she said, not as yet with any realising shame or horror, but like a child making a forced confession, and dreading the punishment to follow.

She put out her hands timidly in instinctive appeal, but before the stony incredulity on his face she shrank back.

“My God!” he said hoarsely. “My God!”

Her arms fell to her side, and her cloak, thrown apart, revealed to those who faced her that that which she had clasped close, that which she had imperilled her own safety to rescue, was her jewel-case!

A man in the stern—he who had before ventured a remark—flung a coarse expression, as he might have flung a stone, at the cowering, trembling creature; from Mary Skelton came a long, shuddering sigh; Rollo, with an infinitely insolent gesture of disdain, withdrew the skirt of his fur coat from contact with her feet; but, save for a quick inhalation and exhalation of the breath, the other occupants of the boat remained dumb. They were rough fellows, stokers and sailors before the mast, but some of them had children of their own, and all of them had hearts that could be reached and outraged. And this black deed—the pity of it, the shame of it—were beyond any words.

For a moment Darnaway sat in stupefied inactivity; then, flinging the intolerable weight of his horror from him, he made a leap to his feet with some wild, mad impulse of yet possible rescue. But a dozen hands pulled him down, and returning reason presently told him it was indeed long too late. Hours upon hours ago, not to-day any longer, but yesterday—an immeasurable time with the dead—

the sea had claimed that little life, and in fathoms of water she lay quietly enough in her last sleep.

So that was the end of poor little Lilla, the unconsidered, the unwanted, whom even Nature had treated like a bastard, endowing her with neither beauty nor charm with which to fight an indifferent world ; a waif to whom time had been a matter of three brief years ; who came into existence with no love to welcome her, and passed out of it with none to remember.

Rightly considered, it was the woman who had so outrageously betrayed her motherhood to whom pity should have flowed, rather than to the little child who could have had no anticipatory horrors of death, whose emancipation from this present life was perhaps no such piece of misfortune—but if John Darnaway should ever arrive at that just view, he was a long way from it still.

For the moment, indeed, he could not reason logically. The sheer abhorrence in his soul made him feel physically sick.

## CHAPTER V

### FELLOW-TRAVELLERS

THE moment had come for the friends to say goodbye. The experiences of the last thirty-six hours had introduced a change into their relations, lifting them, as it were, on the top of a wave into a sudden new knowledge of each other's character and mind; and though neither had spoken of the harrowing contingency, each felt that the soul of the other had rebelled and sickened with his.

The boat's crew, surviving the discomforts of the night, found themselves at daybreak within sight of the Cornish coast, not many miles, indeed, from the reef where the gallant ship had met her doom. They were soon hailed by the friendly coastguard, and before noon found themselves taken into the hospitality of a little moorland village a mile or so inland, which opened its humble doors and made them heartily welcome to the contents of larder and clothes-press.

When they met at evening outside their respective cottages they were indeed still arrayed in the miscellaneous contributions kindness had bestowed on them, and, with the usual contrariness that follows such cases, Darnaway had fallen heir to the Sunday best



of a man of puny frame, while Mary Skelton's slim waist was lost in the voluminous folds of a gown many sizes too large. The unfamiliar aspect each bore to the other laid a momentary constraint upon their tongues; it is an ancient axiom that our clothes have a close connection with our manners. She had a fastidious dislike to the touch of the coarse material that flowed round her in such unnecessary abundance; he was sensitively unconscious of the unclothed length of wrist and ankle which made him look like an overgrown charity-school boy.

To lighten the tension she laughed, and he joined in. It was a relief to laugh again, after the acute pitch to which sensibility had been strained.

"Are you really going to set out in those clothes?"

"What would you advise?" he queried. "Would a dress suit, rent up the back and green with seawater, inspire greater confidence in the public mind, do you suppose?"

"You look," she said, her eyes dancing, "you look like the illustrations of Smike in an early Dickens."

"Shall I tell you," he menaced, "what *you* remind me of?"

"No, pray spare me the portrait! You don't suppose I'm going to masquerade long in these duds!"—she gave a disdainful flick to her bodice. "Imagine being interviewed and having one's portrait taken in this! I shall wait here until my people send me the garments of civilisation. You had much better do the same."

"I haven't any people, to begin with ; but I dare say the slop-shops of Falmouth will do as well. But I don't feel quite easy in my mind about leaving you behind."

"I can't go like this."

He wondered at her a little. She had been so plucky, so self-forgetting in the face of real hardship, and now, when her going with him seemed of some importance, she hung back on a question of appearances.

"I can't help it," she said, quick to read his thought. "We women are made that way. We can face a good knock-down blow, but these collateral side slaps and pinches are not to be borne. I will *not* make myself a spectacle for gods and men ! And besides," she added inconsequently, "you must wait."

"Ought I to wait ?" he asked.

She was silent a moment, fighting with her desire to say yes. She had only to say it for him to comply. They were good enough friends for that. He would stay with her, and then——She did not pursue her thought further, for, with a kind of disgust of her own weakness, she knew she was going to bid him set out. It was a poor sort of consolation for that bit of sacrifice on her part, that he would go with his whole mind turned to revolt, in grim rebellion against the task he had appointed himself ; for he was about to accompany Lilith Shore to London.

She gave herself a breath to think of it all before she condemned herself to solitude.

Theirs had been the only boat which landed on

this particular part of the coast ; but the others had equally reached shelter, and in the course of a few hours had all been accounted for. From various points the forlorn passengers of the *St. George* were even now making their way to the larger centres of life ; but before they could entirely scatter and be lost, Darnaway desired to find out if, by a bare chance, some one more humane than the mother had given thought to the child.

The little village in which they found themselves, separated by many miles of heathland from any town, boasted only one trap, and that had been instantly chartered by Rollo. He graciously offered Darnaway a seat in it.

"I'm going to claim compensation from the company for that portmanteau," he said, "and you'll be handy to prove that you saw me with it in my own hand, when that brute of a sailor kicked it into the sea. I could have kicked him after it if there had been time. Oh, you're going to stay with the women ! Well, I wish you joy of one of them. I've had enough of her ; she threw me over after Naples for that cad Ainslie, but I've taken jolly good care to let her see it's *my* turn to play that game. If I chose to talk, I could make it pretty nasty for her !"

"Take yourself and your foul mouth away, and be damned !" cried Darnaway, in sudden rage and hate. "If you were worth it, I would let you feel the strength of Australian muscle, but you're not."

And since, with persons of the Roderick Rollo type, discretion is ever the better part of valour, he went.

The others of their party gradually melted away during the next twelve hours, some on foot and others in carriages which Rollo's driver had been able to order for them. Darnaway, however, could not make up his mind to leave the sea border until his fears were confirmed. He relied on the help of the coastguard, and full information could only be a matter of a day or two, since in that time papers with lists of the rescued would reach even this remote hamlet. But meanwhile, there was Mrs. Shore.

"Go," said Mary Skelton, when he had explained his plans. "I will stay till you return."

But when she caught some glimpse of his design, Lilith Shore flung herself upon him.

"Don't go! don't go!" she implored, "or, if you must, take me with you. How can I be left—how can I find the way? I have never been in England before. I have never seen my husband's father or sister. And—and I am afraid of everything, but most of all of the sea." She shuddered with unfeigned terror. "If you leave me here, alone, where I can hear it all night and all day in my ears, I shall die!"

Neither trouble nor distress seemed to have power over this woman's beauty. It shone the more for these, since her eyes had now depths of tragic meaning, and her pallor gave her a new distinction; not even the poor clothes—a jacket of some much-washed print and a skirt of linsey—could deprive her of her beautiful curves; but her physical perfection left the blood in Darnaway's veins ice. He saw her nakedly,

without that irradiation ; and, if he had obeyed the impulse that was uppermost, he would have shaken off the light touch of her fingers on his arm as he would have shaken off a viper.

Under the very real tenderness of his nature there lay a hard, logical deposit, the rock beneath the sand upon which the foundations of character were built. It made him unyielding, perhaps unjust, in such judgments as he was forced to form. Not a man who willingly thought evil of his neighbour—emphatically a man to think and expect the best of all women—he yet found it impossible, where once his eyes had been opened, to shut them even momentarily. With lost respect, all went past recovery, and into the empty chambers of faith and good-will scorn crept.

One more sensitively constituted must instantly have felt and shrunk from this latent antagonism ; but Lilith Shore had only the instinct of a hurt and frightened animal, when she turned to him for protection and defence. Of all those with whom she had flirted and laughed not one was left, and the man who had piqued her by his careless indifference to her beauty was the man to whom she now instinctively clung. She cared for nothing but to get behind the shelter of his strength, where she could not see eyes staring at her or lips forming themselves into whispers about her.

“ I must go,” he said coldly, “ but you will be quite safe here. Miss Skelton will stay with you, and by to-morrow your friends will be here.”

“ But—if I ask you to stay ? ”

It was an attempt, pitiful in its way, coming tremblingly from her white lips, to assert the power she had never found fail her ; but it did not succeed now.

His eyes were lowered. There was a shame in seeing her shame.

"I am going to seek the child," he said, driven to bluntness.

She shrank away from him like a dog from the whip, and his pity was touched. Yet he knew instinctively that what she really recoiled from was the chill of his displeasure. Remorse was not yet awakened. Her sorrow, if she had any to spare from herself, was purely conventional, a reflection of what the world deemed ought to be felt in like circumstances. Could she have been cast away on some bountiful, lonely island, with the sun to stream in comforting warmth over her limbs ; ripe fruit to pluck with an idle hand, flowers to deck her, and no prying eyes to search out her secret, she could easily, wrapped in sensuous well-being, have forgotten that tragic hour, and, in forgetting it, the past would have been for her annihilated.

She was not an inhuman monster ; she was simply a woman who had so cushioned life that not so much as a wrinkle had been allowed to disturb its even surface ; the intrusion of this ghastly tragedy left her with a feeling of paralysing helplessness, the victim of a cruel and undeserved fate.

When Darnaway turned away she withdrew into the cottage, and flung herself down upon the bed. The room was small, dark, and very poorly furnished ;

but it was the best in the tiny house, and it had been generously made over to the two ladies.

Mary Skelton watched Darnaway as he went towards the shore, until the uneven ground hid him. The fog was now entirely dissipated, but the undulations of stony heathland looked black and nipped under a sunless spring sky. The hamlet—for it was little more—gave all its sons and fathers to the sea; the prevailing fish odour would have told you that, even if the women seated on doorsteps mending nets had not done so. In such a place, on a shore so designed for a death-trap, the mishap that had overtaken the *St. George* was a very ordinary affair, scarcely to be reckoned among the desolating griefs that, each season of tempest, broke like a high tide over some one of those humble homes.

Some realisation of this came to Mary Skelton as she looked about her, and even the vexatious travesty of her usual self she now presented when she would have liked to make a pleasing last impression, and the loss of a very considerable quantity of finery and jewellery, seemed a mere trifle in the balance of restored life.

If only the sea had been altogether merciful!

Thinking, with that involuntary throb of pain that came with every recollection of the innocent sacrifice, she turned back into the cottage and stood a moment by the bed. The figure flung there, graceful in its abandonment, did not move, and presently she knew, by the measured breathing, that Lilith Shore was asleep.



She could sleep, undeterred by the moan of the sea ; she could sleep, and only last night——

“ If I were a better woman, I should know how to help her,” Mary Skelton said to herself ; “ but, God forgive me, I can’t even pity her.”

She lifted a cover that had fallen to the floor, and deftly, without disturbing the resting woman, threw it over her. She was very weary herself, her limbs aching, her eyelids heavy with fatigue ; but there was only one bed, and she could not bring herself to share it with Mrs. Shore. She did not wish her to take cold, but sleep beside her she could not.

Casting about for something to wrap herself in, designing to rest on the floor, she remembered a cloak which some one, better provided than she, had flung to her on the wreck. It might be dry now.

She crossed to the kitchen to ascertain, and found it not only dry, but toasted to warmth before a great peat fire, where also hung the ruins of her evening finery.

“ Oh, how nice ! how good you are to us ! ” she exclaimed, drawing it luxuriously about her shoulders, as appreciative of the somewhat damaged cat-skin lining as if it had been silver-fox.

Her listener, an old shrivelled little woman with a weather-scourged face, smiled amiably, and, pulling round an ancient winged chair, invited her to seat herself before the glow, which she did, nothing loath, and in another minute was fast asleep.

The old woman paused in her task of cookery to examine her, through dim eyes, with a minute

scrutiny. Shipwrecked folk in plenty had crossed the stage of her life, but rarely had such fine players come upon the scene. Here was a romance, as it were, thrown up by the sea at her feet. And which of them was the sweetheart of the gentleman who had borrowed, with handsome promise of payment, Jim Tregartha's Sunday suit? The one with the yellow hair, who did nothing but cry and complain, or this one with the black lashes and the slim, straight way with her that you could see even under Martha Pengelly's mother's gown, a cherished wincey that had been a best for ten years, and was now likely to be succeeded by a better still?

With characteristic thrift, and yet a half sigh that she had had nothing of her own to make over to the lady, she stooped and turned up the hem of the skirt that the fire might not scorch it, thereby disclosing Miss Skelton's not particularly small, but smartly-shod feet. The sight of the amazing beads and buckles almost decided her that this must be the one, for a romance she would have, and built it to her simple old fancy. How poor a foundation the fabric had, Miss Skelton might have told her, and, who shall say, not without a sigh of vain regret?

Darnaway's return alone next afternoon explained his failure.

He shook his head mournfully when Miss Skelton ran to meet him from a little headland where she had been watching for his coming, and no word was said. Mrs. Shore asked no questions. When Darnaway

next saw her, he told her that the village cart was now at their disposal.

Her relatives had made no sign. She explained that they lived, she believed, in a very retired corner of Essex, where news of the wreck might not yet have reached them : and, in any case, an old man with an only daughter to leave behind was not likely to travel so far. Her urgency to leave was painful in its intensity. She longed to fly from her own depression.

There was now, indeed, no reason for delay. Darnaway still hoped Miss Skelton would change her mind and go with them, but she declined. By the last trap which had crossed the moor from the station she had had a telegram.

"My aunts and cousins will all be here immediately," she said as they walked back to the village, "half a dozen of them, all anxious to prove that they're delighted I'm not drowned ; so you can devote yourself to looking after that poor wretch, as I know you want to do."

"I don't," he said, with laconic grimness.

"At least you're going to, and that's everything."

"So would you, if——"

"If Mrs. Jane Pollhue's stepmother's sister's gown permitted it? That's its genealogy, I think. No, you can't make us the same. There's just this difference between us. You reach your aim, while I come short of my intentions! *Vous êtes un homme brave*," she said suddenly, after a pause, as if the foreign setting of her praise made it easier to utter,

"I thank you," he said, the colour coming up under the tan of his face, "but I don't deserve your kind thoughts."

"I make you a present of them, all the same!" she retorted gaily.

Yet when the travellers had mounted the cart; when, with a softening of her bright eyes, she had returned his warm handclasp; when the wheels had even begun to make quicker revolutions, she darted into the cottage and flew out again and after them, stumbling over her trailing gown.

Darnaway touched the driver on the elbow, and he pulled up the pony to a walk.

"Coming after all?" he cried briskly, preparing to dismount.

"No, don't get down. I only brought this." She had the cloak she had slept in on her arm, and she threw it into Mrs. Shore's lap.

"It's rather ancient, and it isn't fashionable," she could not resist the sting, "but it will keep you warm."

"Mind you come to see me," she called out to Darnaway, when the cart had again started and he shouted back heartily:

"Of course!"

It seemed to him a very irony of fate that he should be compelled to leave behind the woman he respected and forced into an unwilling companionship with the woman he loathed; but to the intolerable inquiry—what was to be done?—he found no other answer than himself to befriend her.

At the little town from which they were to start to catch the express at Exeter they had an hour to wait. He used it to get himself some ready-made clothes, and, before leaving her, rather awkwardly suggested that she might like to do the same. She had no money, but he had had, the day before, an opportunity to telegraph to his bankers, and was ready to supply her. To his relief she made no difficulty, and, putting her into a cab with instructions to the driver that she was to be taken to the best shop, he left her.

When they met again at the appointed time she saw him give an involuntary start to see her all in black, with the little tulle border of a widow under her bonnet brim, and she coloured up, her eyes falling before his.

"My father-in-law would—expect it," she faltered.

Then he remembered to have heard that she had not been long a widow.

He could find nothing to say. Indeed, during the first tedious hours in a slow train, their silence was scarcely broken. He searched his mind for some commonplace, and could find nothing that fitted. It was the more intolerable because her looks were always upon him with timid watchfulness. She cowered in her corner almost as if she expected him to turn upon her and lash her with his scorn.

He found the situation nearly impossible. Yet once, when she tried an exculpatory phrase, he involuntarily put up his hand to ward it off. Anything was better than that!

At Exeter, where they had perforce to lunch together, he felt himself emancipated from travelling in the same carriage, and put her into a ladies' compartment, providing her with light literature and ordering a tea-basket to be handed in at the half-way station; then, with a sigh of relief, he stepped into his own smoking-carriage.

The London papers had now reached the book-stalls, and he provided himself with a sheaf: the *Times*, *Standard*, *Chronicle*, *Telegraph*—in whose pages he was able to read the last account of the wreck. Mention was made in all of the safe arrival of the boats, with lists of passengers and crew; and leading articles made much of the happy escape of all on board. In one paper alone was there any allusion to the child, who was said to have died of exposure in the open boat.

Reporters are not always infallible, or else—had some humane-minded witness given the ghastly story this less inhuman turn? Darnaway, remembering the jewel-case he had but a few minutes before placed in the rack, felt that he could have shown no such mercy.

And yet he was glad—glad that little Lilla should be undisturbed in her last sleep by the impulsive pity of every mother in the land.

It could not bring her back to life again; and, in truth, such life as hers was like to have been was better forfeit.

## CHAPTER VI

TOSH

AS Darnaway stepped from the carriage at Waterloo he was arrested by a vigorous slap on the back, and turning, resentful of the liberty, was met by the beaming face and hailed by the eager voice of a young giant.

"Tosh!" he exclaimed, annoyance melting, as it was bound to melt before the heartiness of the boyish welcome, expressed in repeated handshakes and exclamations of satisfaction, "what brought you here, boy?"

"What brought me here? Why you, old mate!" cried young Hazlett with a laugh. "You don't give a chap a chance every day to congratulate you—and himself. And if it hadn't been for my confounded luck in being nine miles from a newspaper (I was in Norfolk for a day's rook shooting), it isn't here but on the shore you'd have found me, leading off the chorus in the 'conquering hero' business. You don't look much the worse for your splash."

"I'm all right. How did you time yourself so well?"

"Chanced it," said the young fellow cheerfully.



"The boss at the hotel put me up to the train times, and I knew you must run in here. If you hadn't come by this I meant to pop into the next down train and do a bit of tracking in the wilds of Devon on my own account."

"Wilds, indeed! Did you expect me to blaze the trees?"

"Oh, well, here you are!" exclaimed Tosh with easy cheerfulness. "I spotted you in a minute, in spite of the stubble!"

Darnaway passed a hand across his chin a little discomfited by the bristles it encountered. A vision of Mary Skelton's laughing face rose before him and caused him to redden secretly.

"I'll certainly be glad to borrow your shaving tackle," he said; but Tosh, regardless of the interpolation, continued—

"*And* the checks!" The corner of his eye lit slyly on the product of the slop-shop which clothed but did not adorn his friend.

"A pity they're not negotiable," said Darnaway imperturbably.

"Stone broke?" queried Tosh, as lightly as if it were a very small thing to lose all your ready cash, as indeed to this young Fortunatus it was. "I'm good for rations and a doss, anyway. Are you going after your—oh, I forgot, you haven't got any swag!"

During this exchange of sentences they had been walking, Darnaway with some show of impatience, young Hazlett with provoking slowness, towards the further end of the train. For reasons which he did

not stop to examine Darnaway would much have preferred to be alone, but scarcely knew how to shake his companion off.

"Tosh," he said finally, "you'd better not wait if you're in a hurry." This was feeble, for Tosh's time was of no particular value to anybody, and least of all to himself. "There's a lady I've promised to look after. She was on the boat and—she's alone. I'll have to see her across to Liverpool Street, so—you see——"

But if this statement was intended to allay interest, it had the very opposite effect. A lady—and in distress? The young man's chivalry, as well as his curiosity, was aroused. As an Australian, brought up in a large atmosphere, unhampered by centuries of tradition, his impulses were at once more primitive and less well reined in than those of an Englishman: he allowed himself to feel and express his feelings more easily.

The whole affair of the wreck, somewhat sensationally set forth by the illustrated papers, had impressed him immensely; he had a hundred questions to ask his father's partner when the latter should have rested and eaten, and to hear that there was to be seen, close by, a woman—a lady—who had come through that thrilling experience—Darnaway saw by the brightening of his eye, the sudden straightening of his big, young body, that to expect him to take a hint, or, indeed, to perceive that any hint was intended, and to retire from the platform was to expect the impossible.

And so, by one of those contingencies that we call accident, he took the two steps forward that brought him abreast of the ladies' carriage, and so turned the corner of his fate.

She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, and there were pretty girls in Australia and prettier girls in England on whom his blue eyes had looked with approval ; but anything to equal the loveliness of the face framed in that sombre bonnet they had never rested on. Could he help it that, being twenty-one, and the fresh, simple, unconventional young fellow he was, he straightway felt rising up within him a capacity for limitless adoration ?

If anything were required to put the finishing touch to his instant subjugation, it was the appealing glance she gave him—at once timid, imploring, confiding, alluring—as he stood blushing and eager at the carriage door beside Darnaway, who was helping her to descend. She drew the heart out of him with those wonderful long-lashed eyes, with their trick of pathos, their command of every device to arrest and attract.

For the moment, indeed, she was not posing ; her soul had been crushed within her by Darnaway's cold, calm courtesy. He knew and he judged her, and such services as he rendered were given for humanity's sake. He would have done as much, she recognised with a kind of amazed bewilderment, for any woman, the ugliest, the poorest of the steerage passengers, if such had stood in need of his help. Her beauty, her fascination had absolutely no power over him ; it was

the mere privilege of sex that had saved her from journeying alone and penniless through an unknown land.

But in the admiration that leapt—kindling it like fire from a lighted torch—to the young's man's face, she found reassurance that her power had not gone from her. As plainly as if he said it in words, he proclaimed her sovereignty. Her wounded and abased vanity lifted its head again; in this warming, consoling atmosphere she drew a less stifled breath. Here was one who knew nothing of her story, who would never have condemned her had he known it, who thought of her only as a lovely lady in distress. Her own self pity welled up as she caught the reflection of the commiseration, sympathy, reverence in his countenance. Ah, if Providence had only given her the comradeship of this brave boy instead of the unwilling help of the austere, unbending Darnaway, who was even now saying in that calm, level utterance that never warmed or wavered—

“We have comfortable time to get across to Liverpool Street before your train starts. If you will allow me, I will see you there, and then, I think, you can have no difficulty.”

“Thank you,” she faltered. “You are very kind. I'm afraid I'm a great trouble to you.”

Darnaway did not even make the conventional protest. He had seen the fatuous look in Tosh's face, and his soul was wroth. It was left to Tosh to look an eloquent denial.

A trouble, this fragile, charming, lovely creature!

If he only had the chance of proving how great a pleasure *he* should feel it to help her!—but Darnaway did not make the offer of his services possible by introducing him. Crusty old curmudgeon! He hurried her away as fast as politeness would permit, the cab that was to carry her into space already at the kerb.

She had no luggage save a small square morocco box which the porter had in keeping, and Tosh, turning away disconsolate from the carriage, forbidden seemingly to follow, and feeling like a knight on whom no fair lady has bestowed a guerdon, was overjoyed to find that, by accident, a cloak had been left behind on the seat she had vacated.

It was a homely article, rusty with much service, but at least it was hers. He hugged it in his arm and fled after the slim black figure, walking with a weary grace. Her hair had loosened itself under the crape bonnet and shone through the thin net veil like new-minted gold.

"How awfully tired she looks," he thought, his young pity stirred afresh. "She oughtn't to be allowed to travel alone."

Arrived at the cab, he almost thrust his friend aside in his eagerness to address her:

"I think," he said stumbly, and blushing in his ingenuous youth as he stood before her hat in hand, "I think you left this behind."

She looked at the cloak, its mangy skin well displayed as it hung on his outstretched arm, and a little shudder of distaste passed over her.

Tosh was at no loss to account for it ; his imagination was pulsingly alive. Of course, she had worn it that night at sea, and the associations were unpleasant. He drew the outheld offering sharply back, ready to fling the offending garment from him ; but she put forth her hand and looked into his discomfited face with a breaking smile.

"Thank you, so much," she said in those flute-like tones of pathos he already seemed to know and wait for. "I fancied it had served its purpose, but perhaps I may yet be glad of it. I have a long, cold drive before me to-night."

The words were nothing, and yet they conveyed the impression that she was being hurried and hustled against her will.

"If I can be of any use," he said, "I've lots of time. I've nothing to do, as you know." The last words were for Darnaway, but the look was for her.

"Heaps of things!" Darnaway responded promptly. "It would save time if you would send these wires—here are the addresses," he tore a scribbled leaf from his pocket-book. "And if you'll have a bit of dinner ready in a couple of hours ——"

And so he was dismissed. He was not so wholly out of humour but that he could laugh aloud to find himself so neatly checkmated as he stood staring after the revolving wheels. He had a momentary impulse to jump into a hansom and follow the growler, but resisted it, with some recollection, perhaps, of Darnaway's certain displeasure. After all,

it was his show. But if he thought he was going to be clever enough to run it all alone —— !

Tosh laughed again, this time with boyish heartiness. He swung aside to send off the telegrams. One of them was to Mrs. Andrew Darnaway, informing her of her relative's safety, and giving the address of Tosh's hotel. These dispatched, he resolved to go home and order the very best dinner that taste and money could secure, with coals of fire in the shape of special brands of wine and cigars. Afterwards, when Darnaway was mellowed and repentant—

But this simple stratagem was defeated by Darnaway's unexpected candour.

"Look here, Tosh," he said, in lazy enjoyment of the best smoke of the day, "you needn't fish. I'll tell you all you want to know in a couple of seconds. That lady is a Mrs. Shore; a widow, as you see. She's an Australian by birth, and her husband, an Englishman, died out there. I never spoke to her in my life till a couple of days ago, when accident threw us together, and, since then, we've exchanged perhaps a dozen sentences."

"By Jove! if I had been on board the *St. George!*" cried the young fellow with a boundless disdain for this waste of opportunity.

Darnaway smiled as he knocked the ash from his cigar with a flick of his little finger.

"If you had been on board, you'd have shared her smiles with a dozen others."

"Well!" said Tosh with a hint of defiance.



"Yes," acquiesced Darnaway, "very natural, as you infer. She's certainly an uncommonly pretty woman."

"Pretty! she's beautiful!"

"Perhaps," said Darnaway calmly, "and as she had no friends to meet her and is a stranger in this country, I couldn't do other than help her. The whole thing was an episode, you see; one of those little incidents of travel that happen to-day and are forgotten to-morrow."

"Not unless——"

"Unless the lady desires it, you would say? In this case, even if Mrs. Shore wished to improve the casual acquaintance (and she has expressed no such wish) she would scarcely have the opportunity."

"I would make the opportunity!" said Tosh with a laugh.

"No, lad, I think not. Her father-in-law is something of a recluse, as I understand, and I don't fancy any one outside of his familiar circle would be welcome in his vicarage."

The hint was lightly given, but Tosh had sufficient gentlemanly perception to accept it.

"She said she had a long drive," he remarked, more by way of filling up the silence than with any idea of throwing out a feeler.

"Yes," said Darnaway, "it's curious how isolated some of these little Essex parishes are yet, in spite of the network of railway lines spread over all England."

He thought he had been very adroit in evading a

direct reply, and that by keeping Mrs. Shore's destination a secret he had locked the door in timely fashion upon an egregious piece of folly. Perhaps he had ; but fate has a way of creeping in at the keyhole that is apt to outwit the cleverest locksmith.

Perhaps it may seem incredible to some that Tosh Hazlett's fancy should have been so lightly caught. Had he been an English youth he would probably have got no further than the wish that it were possible to establish a flirtation with a young woman who was "ripping" or "stunning," according to the slang of the hour ; but, being of a younger race, and a vastly more limited experience than the average Briton, he had not learnt to deal his heart out in little bits with a reserve stock always in hand for the next claimant, but was ready with foolish lavishness to pour out its entire warm treasure into the first deserving lap.

To understand this, one must remember that since he left school he had lived almost entirely on his father's large and rather isolated station. It was a jolly life, free and breezy and careless, and full to the brim of bodily comfort and physical activity ; for William Hazlett was one of the fortunate squatters who did not owe so much as a cent to the banks and could count his spreading acres his very own ; but it entailed a much fuller acquaintance with stockmen and station hands and horses and wethers than with pretty young ladies, or indeed ladies neither young nor beautiful.

It was his mother who woke up one day to the conviction that this defect in her boy's social equip-

ment must be remedied ; she it was who persuaded his father that their boy would not suffer by seeing a little more of the world and acquiring that shining polish which travel and knowledge of men and manners is supposed to bestow.

She sent him, her only child, away heroically, resolving to keep back her tears till he was out of sight, and after the last regretful hug which ruffled her smooth hair and undid that fine vow as to tears (perhaps his own blue eyes were moist as he dried hers) he set out with cheerful zeal. Life was a very jolly affair, and travel was, perhaps, one of its jolliest chapters. So he had set out with well-lined pockets and ill-defined views as to Oxford or Cambridge, but very decided ones as to the necessity of having a real good time.

When, a month or two later, Darnaway rode over to Macoomba to say goodbye to Mrs. Hazlett, that lady gave him tea in her own pretty little sitting-room where she only received her favourites. She was a dear woman, with simple manners and kind, anxious blue eyes, and when he went away he found himself wondering whether he was going to the old country in fulfilment of a dream twenty years old, or merely as the guardian of a young Tosh who, twenty years ago, was in long clothes !

But, apart from his promise, he would in any case have naturally seen much of Tosh. He liked the lad, whom he had known since he wore knickerbockers and could give a sounder licking and eat more green apples without detriment to his internal economy

than any boy in his school. The liking, indeed, was mutual, expressed on Tosh's side by an irreverent affectionateness, a readiness to chum which very comfortably bridged the ravine of seventeen years between them.

It annoyed Darnaway that, in the very first hour of their meeting, he should have to put out a curbing hand. It went, perhaps unjustly, to harden an impression already pretty firmly outlined of Mrs. Shore and to make him doubly glad that he had seen the last of her.

There was scarcely one chance in a thousand that they should ever cross each other's tracks again. With all his shrewdness, he did not tell himself that it is the unexpected which happens.

Before either of them had spoken again, the waiter came in with a telegram. Darnaway read it, re-read it, and pushed it across the table with eyes that twinkled.

Tosh laboured over the disjointed sentences in which the practical and the pious were intermingled.

"God be praised that you are safe. Hope you remembered to change your feet."

"To change your feet! What the dickens does it mean?"

Darnaway laughed.

"In bare English, my sister-in-law hopes I had the prudence to put on dry stockings."

"It's awfully like what the mater would say!"

"It's what any motherly soul would say, but only a Scotchwoman could put it in that enthralling way."

You see, Master Tosh, it's one of the manifold advantages of being born North of Tweed that you've two languages at command—a common one for everyday barter and exchange, and an inner or private one for what I may be allowed to call the speech of the heart.”

“By Jove! they'll have to put up with good colonial English when I go North!”

“And when is that likely to take place?”

“Oh, one of these days. I'll run up while you're there, and then you can show me round. See?”

“That will be a privilege,” said Darnaway dryly. Then, after a moment's thought—

“Better come along with me.”

“When?”

“In a week's time, or less, if I can get some clothes together earlier.”

“Not good enough, old mate.” Tosh shook his blonde head with a smile. “I haven't come to the end of the fair here yet.”

In a minute more Darnaway nodded acquiescence.

Of course the boy, with his pocket full of money and his introductions, wasn't likely to find London in the early springtime dull enough to be run away from. And as for the fears which had prompted his own sudden suggestion—what did they amount to? Adventuress as he held her to be, Mrs. Shore was scarcely likely to escape from her Essex fastness to seek among the myriads of London for this one unit of whom she knew nothing except that he was fair and big as a young Northern god and susceptible as surely never was son of Thor.

Even if she had the wish to run away, she had no money. There was comfort in the thought.

As for Tosh himself, there was such a thing as honour, and the lad claimed to know the meaning of that brave word when he said with a laugh that was significant—

“You may trust me, you know, old mate!”

“I’ll ask Mary Skelton to look after him,” Darnaway arranged with himself, but he had in the end to do it in writing, for when, turned out in the correctest fashion by his tailor, and promising himself no little satisfaction out of the interview, he called at Portland Place, he was disappointed to find that she was from home.

A day or two later he went North without seeing her.

## CHAPTER VII

### HĒLA'S HOME

HOME for Darnaway was represented by his sister-in-law's small grey house wedged between tall, grey houses like a dwarf guarded by giants : No. 20, Pleasance Place, Edinburgh.

She had settled there on the death of her husband, that Andrew Darnaway who was by a number of years the elder of John, and his only near relative. Andrew had practised in a modest way as a Writer to the Signet, and had thus secured, also in a modest degree, a place in that exclusive little professional set which in the provincial capital calls itself Society. But he left very little money behind him, and his widow had perforce to renounce even such mild gaieties as her conscience countenanced.

Behind the shelter of her " blacks " (those deeps of crape which wifely piety enjoined) she sank, perhaps not unwillingly, since she had not many social qualifications, into complete obscurity. She had been a year alone and had adjusted life to what may be called the " penny-in-the-slot " system—not much of anything, but the most for your pennyworth—when Darnaway sent little Hēla Carmichael home to her



care. Hēla had been first of all offered to her own aunt, a lady of some pretension to fashion as it is understood in the commercial circles of Glasgow, who, having already five daughters, showed an undisguised reluctance to adopt a sixth.

"I think she had better be sent to her mother's relatives in Germany," she wrote in reply to a proposal she thought officious and unwarranted. "I believe they are quite respectable—for foreigners; and they have really more claim to the child than I, who have not heard of my poor brother for years."

But Hēla was not sent to Germany, and in the Eastern city she was imbued with that traditional contempt for its Western rival which, in the end, prevented her from knowing her relatives there in more than name.

Her £50 a year patched Mrs. Darnaway's reduced circumstances, and in return for it she gave the little one a conscientious observance that Darnaway found infinitely boring as she expressed it in her letters.

When Hēla grew old enough to wield a pen, she herself wrote twice a year, on the birthday of the world and her own birthday, to her guardian: letters that might have been entertaining had they not been so obviously edited. Darnaway, who hated letter-writing, did not reply, but he now and then sent her presents, increasingly valuable as his circumstances improved, and he so managed her affairs that by the time she was sixteen her little income had doubled itself.

Having thus comfortably eased himself of his

burden, it had never occurred to him to ask himself what sort of mothering the child was likely to get. He knew his sister-in-law to be a good woman, and it seemed to him that she had thus all the qualities necessary for the part he had asked her to play.

The substitution of the real for the imaginary picture he had formed of her was among the first of the mental readjustments he, as a returned native, was destined to make. She was not less good than his prevision of her, but her goodness had a different quality. Physically she answered even less well to his ideal ; he had thought of her as plump, youngish, and comely (had not Andrew ever an eye to a pretty face?) He found her the reverse of all these ; and he had an instantaneous conviction that she must have been by a good many years Andrew's senior.

She had an honest, grave, composed, long-lipped face ; her grey hair was made as little of as if it ought to be ashamed of itself for being visible at all beneath the black and white lace cap, and her shiny bodice hung in rather forlorn wrinkles from her flat shoulders. In her severe integrity, life seemed to her, like history, all praise or blame. She nurtured benevolence sedulously, as a Christian duty ; if she loved her neighbour more than herself it was only because she thought it right to discourage a too high opinion of her own merits. She could be got round, possibly, but she could not be taken in.

Such was his hasty generalisation of her character as they sat opposite each other at dinner on the second day of his visit, and perhaps it was as true

as are most of our suppositions about our neighbour.

"You will recognise the old things?" she said, seeing his glance go round the room.

Yes, he recognised them, every one. The old-fashioned sideboard with its sliding panels, and the knife-boxes like funeral urns standing at each corner; the chairs set precisely against the wall where they had rubbed a horizontal line on the red flock-paper; the backgammon board deceitfully simulating two volumes of improving literature; the shining copper tea-urn. The room was smaller than that they had furnished in his boyhood, and standing out bulkily they seemed to thrust themselves upon his notice.

"You have changed nothing," he said, and wondered why he should feel oppressed. Even the portrait of his grandmother was in the familiar place above the mantelpiece, a bland old lady in a satin gown with a book in her hand—a concession to the taste of the artist, no doubt, since she had never been known to read.

"Except that we don't use the knife-boxes now. Once when I had some friends to drink tea, Helena put the best spoons down the slits, and we had a job to shake them out again, so after that I told Katie McAllister we would just not use them. The key's in my basket now."

"So Hēla was a pickle!"

"She was a handful—whiles." She smiled for the first time, and he noted the softening and improving of her rugged countenance. "I had a work to make

her learn her questions. I doubt if she knows them now."

"Her—questions?"

"Her catechism. You'll be knowing it better under the old word 'carritch.'"

"Well do I remember it under either ominous name! Did you make the child go in for polemics, Rachel?"

"I don't know about polemics, John. I thought you wanted the bairn brought up a good Presbyterian?" her face was warningly grave again.

"Of course," he assented hastily, "and—a knowledge of the Shorter Catechism is still considered essential?"

"Mr. Meldrum certainly thinks so," she said with severe brevity. "I was brought up on it myself and so was your brother Andrew. Many a time I've heard Andrew say the Catechism has made Scotland what it is. It contains the whole of religion."

Religion meant something quite different to him, at once so much more and so much less; but he did not disturb her by saying so. She was already looking at him a little doubtfully, distrustfully, perhaps——

"You'll have been so long away," she said, but the apology was half-hearted.

"And that has made me the better Scot," he said brightly. "You know absence makes the heart grow fonder of country as of sweetheart. Andrew, poor fellow, couldn't outdo me in loyalty there."

"Yet you never came back," she said, without

intended sarcasm. "We were married when you were in that office in London—you would be sixteen then——"

"Sixteen, and shut within four dreary walls before a ledger for nine hours out of the twelve. What a life!"

"And you sailed from London without coming home," she went on with her chronicle, unheeding the interruption, "and five years from our wedding-day Andrew died."

"Yes," he said, "that was a trouble, and—not to see him again. But after that, there was more to remain for than to come back to—except you and the little girl," he added with hurried amendment. A moment later he knew he might have left the clumsy correction unmade.

"There was nothing in us to bring you home," she said, with entire sincerity. "What could you be caring about an old woman you had never seen, and a bairn you knew almost as little of? You could have done nothing for her then but maybe spoil her. And she was very well with me: she was fine company."

"I knew she would be in good hands."

"Many a time I've wondered what you did it for;—I'll ring when I'm ready for you to clear, Kitty McAllister." She waved the entering servant austere away, and Darnaway understood that the moment was serious.

The solidly-cut decanters of port and after-dinner sherry, each with an identifying silver label tied

round its neck, stood before him, but she had scarcely begun to sip her glass. He filled his own.

"Why I sent her home to you?" he asked, helping her out.

"Why you became answerable for her, a little thing like that, and you no more than a laddie yourself."

"I have often asked myself that, too," he said lightly, yet thinking the while of Jim Carmichael's piteous dying appeal. "But you see, it hasn't been much of a responsibility so far as I'm concerned, since I shouldered all that on to you."

"She was little then——"

"And now that she is no longer little, perhaps she will choose a guardian for herself."

She looked at him in surprise over the top of her spectacles.

"You would have allowed her to do that?"

"So," he said, shrewdly, "there have been lovers!"

She stiffened within her old black silk bodice; his Colonial freedom of speech on such a subject was an offence to her.

"There have been—attentions," she admitted. "There was a young man who used to walk home with her from the Sunday school and carry her hymn-book; but I told Helen I couldn't allow such on-goings without your knowledge."

"Good Heavens!" he cried, sitting up, "did you expect this *preux chevalier* to ask my permission to carry the hymn-book?"

"The young man's name was Tod," she corrected dryly, "and I expected you to do your duty. I suppose, as you undertook to be her guardian, you have got to decide who she'll marry."

"And I in Australia!"

"That's what Helen said: 'Am I to take them all across the sea for his inspection and leave those behind me that he doesn't approve of?' But girls will say these things."

He laughed at the "all." Clearly the large Hēla had lost none of the little Hēla's spirit; but he was uncomfortable too.

"You haven't a portrait of her?"

He had expected her to say no; but to his surprise she rose and went to a little shelf by the fireplace on which her work-basket stood. The big Bible, out of which she read nightly to an audience composed of Kitty, was there too, and a solid biography from the library, which she took in daily chapters (as if it were medicinal) between her after-dinner nap and teatime. She sat habitually in the dining-room, regardless or disdainful of post-prandial smells, and thus she had all her properties at hand. From under some mendings in her basket she drew a large photograph, and without herself looking at it, handed it to him.

"She sent me that last week. It was done in Germany."

He took the picture, expecting he knew not what, and almost started at that which he saw. For the young face depicted there was so full of innocent goodness and mirth and charm! It was a round



face, and he could imagine it to glow with health. The forehead was square and shapely, with hair that blew about it in natural waves : from under the fine, straight lines of eyebrow the large and clear eyes looked at you with a merry challenge, but the feature he examined most was the mouth. The upper lip was so short and tilted, it almost seemed as if it could not close upon the even teeth. It gave a great piquancy and distinction to a face that might otherwise have been unremarkable.

"It is her father's mouth," he said to himself ; "if she has his fun and his pluck, poor chap, she'll do."

"You never told me she was—like that," he said aloud.

"Like what?" asked the practical Rachel.

"She's a very attractive-looking girl," he said soberly.

"She's not ill-looking," Rachel admitted, as if it were the height of praise, as indeed, coming from a Scotchwoman, perhaps it was ; "but she's headstrong. Nothing would keep her from going to Germany when her grandmother wrote for her. She was neither, you might say, to haud nor to bind. I was all for her waiting till you got home ; but she said she had waited for you seventeen years, and if she waited seven months more her grandmother might die, and then she would never be able to forgive you. I told you she was wilful, John."

"I think she was quite right to go," he said, not sorry, perhaps, to postpone for a little longer the exercise of authority over this saucy, high-spirited

young woman. "I have always thought it was right she should know her mother's people."

"Well, if you're pleased——" she said, dubiously ; "but I want you to understand it was none of my doing. I never was in foreign parts myself but the once, when Andrew and me took a jaunt to Paris for a week, and I'm thankful I need never go again. I mind how glad we were to get home and sit down to a good gigot of mutton, for we never got a mouthful over yonder we could eat, and as for the talk—it's maybe a mercy when you *don't* understand. Though," she added in simple parenthesis, "I was always thought to be very quick at the French at school. We were there over the Sabbath, but it would beat you to know it from Monday, what with the play-acting and the music, and the shops open. An ungodly nation, and like Babylon the Great it will come to its fall."

He might have smiled if he had not understood her so well ; but he tried to re-assure her instead. Her words came to him as an echo of the talk he had heard in his boyhood, when everything that was "foreign" was anathema and offence to the untravelled Scot. Strange that a nation so prone to roam, out of which the bravest pioneers and the best colonists are made, should sit so close to the home hearth ; but so it was in the past to which Rachel Darnaway belonged. For she was one of those people born, as it were, mature, and never able to progress with the passage of time.

"Hēla will be all right," he said. "Germany's

more like Scotland, you see, and it's in a measure her own country. Besides, Frau von Glümer is English on one side, I believe. She'll feel quite at home."

"Heaven forfend!" said the old lady piously, and he could see that she was really moved. Beyond her honest little Scotland, in that Unknown to which Hēla had flitted so gaily, were bred wars and revolutions and socialism and all the things that made the newspapers dark reading. Besides the vague terror, there was the distaste of a housewife steeped to the lips in her own traditions for a nation that honoured bare "slippy" floors more than carpets, and slept by preference under rather than on their featherbeds and let good kail go rotten before they ate it. And that Hēla should prefer this to the high privilege of living in Edinburgh and should learn to talk in another tongue!—for somehow, in the entanglement of distrust and disapproval in her mind, it was an additional grievance that the German should speak German, though, had she been a traveller, she might have found his systematic attempt to practise her own tongue still more offensive.

It was by her evident disturbance he came to understand how much she really loved the child who had been as her own all these years. He could have found it out in no other way, unless the hiding of Hēla's photograph in the basket under the knitting and the mendings where it could be often looked at surreptitiously, were an indication. She was so moved from her usual routine that she allowed

the table to remain uncleared a whole hour longer than was customary—an unheard-of event in the reign of Kitty McAllister.

Indeed, it was Kitty, big, red-headed and forty, who brought the delinquency home to her mistress by entering boldly with crumb-brush and tray flourished battle-wise, and an air that said as plain as words :

“If you think I’m going to put up with these new-fangled ways, you’re mistaken.”

“Is it time for worship, Kitty?” questioned Mrs. Darnaway in a flurry.

“It’s chappit ten,” said Kitty grimly.

The old lady shrivelled under the implied reproof. Never before had “worship” been held a minute later than half-past nine except on the rare occasions when there was “company.” Could her brother-in-law be included under that saving head? She looked across at him, ready to snatch at him as an excuse; but Kitty, jingling the glasses with an angry hand, was looking at him too.

“Gif ’oor tae be pit oot like this ilka nicht,” she began with the freedom of a domestic tyrant, “I wad like tae ken——”

But Mrs. Darnaway’s bodice could stiffen on occasion for Kitty too.

“Bring the books,” she said briefly.

She read the Bible, as many of her generation read it, with an exaggerated slowness and solemnity of diction and a mouthing of the words that would have been absurd if it had not been so sincerely

meant for reverence. And afterwards, still seated in her place with the Book closed before her, she offered up an extempore prayer.

Darnaway knelt, but perceived that Kitty continued to sit solidly on the square of chintz stuff she had spread on the leather chair nearest the door, and was thus made aware that he had transgressed another unwritten family law.

The prayer, too, was like everything else, a voice calling out of the past with no unfamiliar note. He might have been a boy again, and those his father's tones busy with sonorous petition, ejaculation, denunciation, and appeal; for the private prayers of Scotland are largely a paraphrase of Old Testament Scripture.

Yet the "amen" was scarcely out of her mouth before she and Kitty were squabbling over a missing teaspoon. There was no intended slight to the Almighty in that either. It was a rule, as of Mede or Persian, that Kitty should bring the plate-basket with her when she came to prayers, and count over the contents with her mistress; and here was the little Queen Anne spoon, sole survivor of its fellows, gone astray.

"Ye'll have thrown it out with the tea-leaves and the potato peelings!" accused Mrs. Rachel, not sorry, perhaps, to be even with her handmaid. "Away and search the ash-bucket, woman, afore it's too late."

But Kitty, arms akimbo, regarded her mistress with a pitying scorn.

"'Deed, mem, afore ye send me on sic a gowk's errand ye wad maybe better look in the wee jeely-pot where ye pit it yersel' no' an hour syne. Aye, I ken fine ye had clean forgot, and when we're a' pit oot o' oor ordin——"

Convicted, Mrs. Darnaway flew to the refuge of the weak and lost her temper.

"Kitty, ye impident hizzy, hold your tongue and leave the room!"

But the unabashed Kitty remained tranquilly triumphant until the last fork had been counted, the necklaces removed from the wine-bottles, and even the snuff mull that had belonged to an ancestor dethroned from its place on the mantelpiece.

Then, with a whisk of her square of chintz, she flounced to the door. There she turned.

"Am I no' tae bring ben the dust-sheets?" she demanded.

But Rachel was at last at bay.

"Away, woman, away to your bed!" she cried, "and leave me in peace."

Darnaway had remained an amazed and amused spectator of the little scene, which conferred on him, as it were, the freedom of the house. This was to make him indeed at home, and he was wondering if he were also expected to go to bed, or whether the suggestion of a pipe in the kitchen would be taken amiss, when his sister-in-law turned to him.

He saw that she was agitated and depressed, but quite wrongly attributed her emotion to the encounter with her maid. That, as he afterwards

knew, was a perennial occurrence, and merely served as a welcome breeze to stir the stagnant waters of life. Mistress and maid alike would have missed far less their daily bread than their nightly bicker.

No, her mind was still dwelling on Hēla, as her first words showed him ; Hēla, far away in that unmapped "abroad" where lax views were held about things to her sacred, and cheap goods were manufactured to ruin British trade.

"John," she said, "you'll not put me to shame by thinking you are not as welcome as the day ; ye would never put such an affront on me that has counted the months till you should be coming home, poor Andrew's only brother."

"Of course not," he said, much wondering. "I have always thought of your house as home, Rachel."

"Aye, but I'm fain to send ye away again. Not the now," she interjected hurriedly, "no' the now. Ye must take your time and see about ye first, but in a whilie, when the summer's near over, I want ye to go and fetch Helen back. I'm uneasy about the lassie. She would maybe not be willing to come for me, but you—as her guardian——"

"I'll go and see her, of course, if you wish it," he said, still very much occupied with his astonishment. "I don't know that I've any right to expect obedience from her, but at least I can explain your wishes."

But Rachel would not have it so,



"It's not me she's got to consider," she said. "It's you, that took her from her father that she's bound to obey. Maybe it was different when you were over yonder across the sea ; but now that you're home, it's you she must look to, John."

## CHAPTER VIII

### DARNAWAY IS DISENCHANTED

AS he sat in Kitty's spotless kitchen, sending careful spirals of smoke up the chimney, John Darnaway felt that he had a right to consider himself a very ill-used man. He was being urged into a position for which he felt himself neither qualified nor inclined. Whatever purpose Nature had intended him to serve, she had certainly not designed him to be a law-giver to a young, high-spirited girl eighteen years his junior.

Eighteen years—it made him absurdly too old for companionship, absurdly too young for authority. The whole idea was ridiculous in the extreme.

He turned himself in the hard Windsor chair to try and find a softer angle, and caught six grinning reflections of himself in Kitty's shining row of dish-covers. Those malign caricatures, dancing diabolically in the firelight, agreed with him that it was very absurd. When he took the child from poor old Jim's side—she had been beside him, wrapped in warm, soft unconsciousness on that remembered night when he was done with his racking cough and at last slept too—he had had a vague idea that he must be good

to her. Toys and sweets, bought in the township from which he had sent her home, had seemed to him then to meet the case, and toys and sweets it had been till now; finer toys and more expensive sweets to meet her growing needs. And he had thought that, by sending her a present twice a year, and a message in his rare letters to his sister-in-law he was fulfilling the whole duty of guardian man! Why not? What was there to guard? Her morals? They had been severely looked after by the conscientious Rachel. Her manners? They were probably the manners of the modern young woman, which no mere male creature would take it upon himself to improve. Her love affairs? What did he know of a girl's love affairs that he should give an opinion? She would take her own way, whether in the form of the young man with the hymn-book, or of that other young man of whom he had vaguely heard at breakfast time with the clanking spurs and the slim waist.

Was it he, after all, of whom good Rachel was afraid—this wolf prowling after her lamb? Even if she had left it in any doubt, he should have known how she felt about the whole map of Europe except that little corner of it labelled the British Isles. She saw no necessity for the existence of those other countries she lumped under the name of "abroad," though perhaps the Almighty had some wise design unknown to her in not permitting to every one the privilege of English—or shall we say Scottish?—ancestry. No doubt she thanked God nightly

in her prayers that she had been one of the selected.

And he was to go and bring Hēla home, and she was to be good and obedient, and pack her trunks and meekly follow him!

He laughed again, this time with his back to the dish-covers. If the photograph did not belie her, hers was not the face of meek acquiescence. She would probably smile at him and defy him, and send him away empty, an exile from his country, for he would never dare face Rachel if he came back alone. Well, he was in for it. He had promised to go. Perhaps—who knows?—he had always intended in the back of his mind—that lumber-room where unimportant things are stored—to go. For old Jim's sake he must see her, and it was a case of Mahomet and the mountain—if she declined to come to him, he must perforce go to her. And, as far as his present surroundings were concerned, there would not be much to regret.

The little kitchen, and indeed the whole of the little house, was so still that his thoughts had freedom to come and go. Only the loud tick of the American clock on the mantelpiece or the fall of a cinder from the dying fire broke the stillness. From the ceiling a long, thin pipe depended, with a bend like a shepherd's crook, whence issued a single jet of flaring, unshaded gas. It revealed triumphantly the scrupulous order of Kitty's kingdom—not a dish out of line, not a pot-lid that did not pretend to be silver, not a dish-cloth that

dared to be dirty. He thought of the dining-room too, the centre of family life, where the same oppressive orderliness prevailed. Had not Rachel folded up his *Scotsman* and his *Times* when for a moment his back had been turned? Seen again mentally, he could detect no corner in it where one might be comfortably untidy, where one might, so to speak, divest oneself of the garments of ceremony and look on life from the standpoint of dressing-gown and slippers. The drawing-room which he supposed to exist he had not seen, still less that inner sanctum which Hēla had called her own for seventeen years; but in no part of the house that he knew could he find a suitable setting for her youth and her winsomeness. He could not "place" her there, with her laughter and her sallies and smiles, her ribbons and laces and bodily vanities, her novels and her music, her lovers and her friends.

And in failing to find a niche for her among Rachel's punctilious precisions, he was forced to ask himself, Had she had such a very good time after all in this home to which he had carelessly assigned her, that he had any right to hale her back to it?—back to the infinitely little cares, the small fusses, the tyrannical limits Rachel set to the kingdom of this world.

Even while he put the question to himself he heard the stealthy thud of a heavy foot that tried to walk softly, and the swish of a garment against the passage wall. Then the handle turned and Rachel herself appeared in the doorway, more

gaunt than ever in the skimpy folds of a drab dressing-gown. The colour mounted in a dull tide to her rugged face, scarce softened by the frill of her night-cap, as she said with stammering embarrassment :

"I thought maybe you had gone to bed and forgotten the gas."

"No, no," he said, divided between annoyance and amusement. "I'm still here, you see. Is it so late?"

"I was thinking maybe the pollisman—(daughter of the manse as she was, she called it 'pollisman')—would be noticing the light and coming to see if anything was wrong. We're such early folk when we're by ourselves."

"We'll do him out of that little excitement, then," he said, rising and extending a hand to the gas stem. His pipe had long gone out.

"Not if you would want to sit up a while longer, John," she made herself say.

"There isn't much to sit up for, is there?" he said pleasantly. "Thoughts are unprofitable company. It's wiser to sleep. Shall I light a candle?"

"I've brought my own," she said hurriedly, as he turned to take the japanned holder from the mantel-piece. "Kitty will want that one in the morning. If ye don't mind going first, John—I'll just come behind ye in a minute. Take the light; I can find my way easy. You can leave it on the table at the stair-head."

Divining that there might be reasons touching her

toilet for this injunction, he obeyed, and climbed the steep, narrow stair, feeling a little like a prisoner marched back to his cell.

"I must get out," he said to himself as he shut the door of his bedroom. "Whether by the route of Germany, or back across the sea, I must get out."

Next morning, as he opened his door to admit his shaving water, he overheard fragments of a conversation in the lower regions. One of Kitty's tactics when she was "put out" (a daily occurrence) was to pretend to a convenient deafness. She had thus trained her mistress to speak in a key that made her remarks audible all over the little house.

"Aye, an egg, ye'll be sayin': I ken, I ken. It's no' the first time I've made yon pudden—" from Kitty.

"*Four* eggs, Kitty, mind what I say."

"*Four!*" with a scream, "an' a' for one man that as like as no' will be turning up his nose at *ony* kind o' pudden. *Four* eggs at a shillin' the twal! It's a mercy the Lord gars the beasts lay in the springtime, or it wad hae been the double, an' a' the same tae you, mem."

"Ye'll put the *four* in if they should cost three shillings the dozen," came in a rising crescendo from Rachel. "It's all very well to scrimp and save when we're by ourselves, just the two of us, and neither of us young enough to be fashing ourselves about what we eat (one for Kitty, that!); but the guest under my roof shall have the best that money can buy, say what ye like, Kitty McAllister."



Darnaway shut out the rest of the dialogue, but he could not so readily shut out his growing sense of irritation.

At breakfast-time Rachel, wielding the large silver tea-pot which had been drawn from its baize cover in his honour, said with laboured lightness :

"There's a letter from Helen."

He looked up with stirred interest.

"How is she getting on?" he asked.

"She doesn't say much. I thought you would like a taste of rizzard haddock, John, and a bit of cake with it;" she pushed the plate of crisp, curled oat-cakes towards him. "I daresay you'll have given up supping your porridge?"

"Not I. It was my breakfast for years as I went up and down country with the waggon. Made it in my pannikin, and got to be a great dab at it, too! But this haddock is a treat. And what is Hēla up to?"

He would have liked to see the letter, but it rested securely in Rachel's pocket and she was evidently reluctant to draw it forth. Only her anxious scrupulosity had made her mention its arrival at all. He could easily enough guess why she did not hand it across to him. Hēla had no doubt been making irreverent remarks about the guardian from whose control she had so successfully escaped, and Rachel was afraid of the effect these might have on his decision to go in pursuit of her.

He laughed inwardly. There would at least be a little excitement in the capture; it offered more

interest than a *tête-à-tête* with the minister, the joy for which Rachel was now preparing him.

"I thought I would ask him to his dinner," she was saying, "but he's that throng, maybe he'll not be able to come. He makes it a point never to go out more than once in the week, on Wednesdays. He says too much of the world disturbs his ministry. Mrs. Meldrum very seldom goes with him. She says there's the Sunday's joint to finish, and that she and the children may as well eat it at home. Mr. Meldrum never could abide hash, poor man. 'If you make a severe call on the brain you must nourish it properly,' he says, and that's why we all like to put our best foot foremost when he comes to dinner."

This was a long speech for Rachel, and he perceived that she was drawing a trail across the scent to direct his thoughts from Hēla. He was to think of Mr. Meldrum instead. But he had seen and heard that worthy on Sunday in his own parish church, and had already come to a conclusion which he did not suppose any amount of dinners eaten in common would materially alter. The narrow head, the thin lips, the fiery blue eyes of the minister bespoke the fanatic: the man who hurls himself against what he conceives to be heresy and heterodoxy and breaks nothing but his own head, and sometimes—when he has one—his own heart.

No such fracture as the latter need be feared for the Rev. Peter Meldrum. He loved himself too well to sacrifice anything to the cause he advocated (with loud denunciation of other people's causes) except

those five dinners he might have eaten ; and that renunciation, as he knew very well, only helped to keep his popularity at high pitch. John felt he could understand Mrs. Meldrum's preference for Wednesday hash and—solitude.

“ Was Meldrum Andrew's choice ? ” he asked.

“ Andrew was an elder in St. Michael's,” she answered. “ Surely you mind that ? Or maybe he would be only a deacon when you left ? We sat under Mr. Sanderson all our married life, but afterwards—I felt I wasn't getting the good I might. Ye see, John, I had to think of my own soul.”

“ Yes, yes,” he assented hastily. He respected her scruples, but he was glad that he need not think of Andrew as a disciple of Meldrum's. He had seemed in so many ways to lose this elder brother since coming home, and first and most of all in his marriage. Yet where, he might have asked himself, is the man or woman who, in marriage, fulfils the expectation of his friends ?

As the days went by, something deeper than the irritation begot by witnessing Rachel's soul-wasting struggle with the petty details of life began to weigh upon his spirit. For a long time he would not allow to himself that there could be any possible disenchantment to blur the realisation of a long-sustained dream. He fought strenuously against the idea that he was lonely, that he was disappointed. Was not this Home ? and had he not for the first time in an arduous life the holiday he had so often longed for, and strength and zeal and money to enjoy it ?

He shook the loose silver in his pockets, as if the sound of it ought to be reassuring ; but money could not do much to temper the restrictions of Pleasance Place. Rachel discouraged presents ; her prudent soul disliked waste, and a present for which you got nothing in return was sheer waste. The second time he sent flowers home from the nurseryman's round the corner she suggested as a more fitting object for superfluous cash, as well as a good spiritual investment, the cause of the "heathen blacks." Did not the mission box stand in the lobby yawning for pence ?

Rachel did not care for flowers except as a kind of furniture for other people's gardens. Her own little strip of "back green" only grew clothes' poles and blossomed on washing-day. He felt like a schoolboy with an ornamental half-crown in his pocket which might not be spent.

And, as the weeks went on, like a schoolboy who has read all the old books and sees the new ones only through the glazed doors of a locked bookcase. In some such fashion he saw the acquaintances of long ago, through a glass dimly. He had been welcomed kindly enough when people knew who he was—Andrew Darnaway's young brother. He had the entry to more than one club, and was asked to dinner in the hospitable Scotch fashion : he was pressed to visit more than one substantial country house ; but in spite of the heartiness, the readiness to "crack" over the past (which was, however, never *his* past) he felt himself hopelessly out of touch with the men who were his contemporaries.

It was illogical, perhaps, to expect that they should also be his friends. Only to a man who had been much alone, and much thrown back upon his memories, would it have seemed possible. Friendship is a plant that needs fostering care; you can't let it lie neglected on the rubbish heap of life for twenty years and expect in one summer's day to force it into sudden bloom. He reminded himself bitterly of that simple platitude as he walked—a stranger—through the grey and silent streets, seeing only the ghosts of his dead boyhood.

One afternoon at the "Travellers'"—that palatial building in the clubland of Princes' Street—he met a man whom he had left a slim youth, but who had now an undeniable stomach and a bald head. This illustrious "traveller," who had spent all his days between George Street and the Grange where he had builded himself a castle, had, after an ill-concealed rummage in his mental cupboards for Darnaway's name, greeted him boisterously.

"Man!" he cried, "I would never have known ye!"

"It's good of you to recognise me from your heights," said Darnaway with a smile, looking down on the little fat man who was a Bailie now, and hoped that his civic virtues would one day be rewarded with the Provostship. In larger visions he saw himself knighted—for inaugurating a new system of sewers, or building an abattoir—or entertaining a Royal Duke at dinner—there are many roads to that coveted honour.

"Aye, but I mind ye fine now — Andrew Darnaway's little tacket of a brother——"

"Yes. Andrew's little brother — grown big."

"To be sure. We were at the High School together. You weren't that big then. I gave you your licks, if I mind right : though that's not yesterday. But few that go abroad so young as you come back again."

"They are wise. One should never come back. It is worse than a blunder — it is a crime."

This was not humour as it was understood of Town Councillors. The little man looked up into the lean, brown face doubtfully.

"But — you'll have done pretty well for yourself?"

"Oh yes!" said Darnaway lightly. "I'm no' complainin'. You see I haven't entirely forgotten my mother tongue."

The embryo Provost started forward.

"You'll come and take a bit of dinner with us," he cried ; but Darnaway had already turned away and was going slowly, a tall, erect figure, down the broad steps.

"Losh me!" cried his discomfited interlocutor, "I mind now. Anderson told me he had made a fortune!"

There was still the city left, the peerless city on her rock with the sea at her feet and the guardian hills gathered close about her ; but here, alas, he had a new ground of quarrel, for she was not the Edinburgh of his youth, the town about whose grey, crooked streets he had walked in many a dream. She was

fairer than of old—like some child of promise grown into a splendid maturity; but he resented the changes which were yet improvements, since they confused his memories and destroyed the harmony of his recollections.

And the day when he went to the Pentlands and found those green hills of home—those lonely, upland silences where, as a boy, he had thought himself lost in an unfathomed vastness—strangely shrunk, strangely belittled to eyes used to the illimitable, immeasurable bush, he could have sat down, grown man that he was, among the startled sheep, and grat not only for the vanished illusion, the shattered dream, but for his own stark disloyalty.



## CHAPTER IX

### A CORAL NECKLACE

LILITH SHORE sat on a bench in the garden of Little Laver Vicarage and looked in front of her with eyes full of a rebellious discontent. The bench was of mere unpainted board, but it was let into the thickness of a great yew hedge which was the glory of the Vicarage garden; and the close, sombre green closed round her like two circling arms.

Mrs. Shore had the instinct of a cat for the warmest corner, and indeed the day was one of those deceptive ones of early spring which look seductive and balmy seen from within, but when you are thus enticed forth seize you by the throat; such a day, in short, as the felicitous Jean Paul had in his mind when he wrote of "winter painted green."

Mrs. Shore knew nothing of Jean Paul, but she knew when the draught went down the back of her neck and crept under the opossum rug to make lead of her feet; she knew that she should be no warmer in the little drawing-room, where the fire had been unlit these many weeks for economy's sake; or in her own bedroom, which was under the roof and was as chilly in the early year as it was suffocating in the

late. And what was there to go indoors for? It was even more dreary there than here, with only the rows of cabbages to stare at and the meadow beyond, through which the sluggish Laver crept at a snail's pace, as if it were an old and decrepit stream, weary of the bustle of life, too bored, even, to respond with any murmur or ripple to the gay greeting of the thrush in the little, white pear-tree. Mrs. Shore harboured a dull resentment against the thrush, and if she had not been too lazy to take a hand from under the rug she would have stooped for a pebble to fling at it. It sang false, since the burden of its music was the coming of life and love and beauty; it was as poor a deceiver as the little pear-tree wearing bridal bloom for a bridegroom who would never come back.

She saw the world as some people see it, as if she were herself the pivot round which it revolved, and when it turned upon her this mocking travesty of a spring that would not bud and burgeon for her she felt she had a right to be angry with its false messenger.

Not so the vicar, whom she perceived going down the central walk towards the little white gate, a tall, spare old man, scrupulously brushed but rather thread-bare, with an aquiline nose and a back which adversity had not yet taught to stoop.

He was turning his head slowly from the side where the cabbages vegetated to the side where the currant bushes made a scanty fringe. To him the cheerful bird spoke of returning sunshine which would chase away rheumatic aches and bring on the fruit and

vegetables to the lessening of the butcher's bill. He would not grudge the bird a little feast when the time came, for so blithely foretelling it. How to circumvent the butcher without offending him, that was one of the great problems of life at Little Laver Vicarage, and it was faced with a fortitude that might almost be called heroic.

Janey Shore, chasing odd ounces with a patient finger up and down the greasy page, was grappling with it now as Lilith idly watched her father-in-law examining with a pince-nez and a thrown-back chin each thrust-up spear of green in the border. Lilith heard the grandfather clock give that preliminary wheezing whirr which announced its intention to strike. Twelve o'clock. Janey would have taken off her kitchen apron and be seated at the davenport before those shiny little books which make Tuesday a black-letter day to so many housekeepers.

Janey and the grandfather clock might be said to tick through life in unison, since life beat for her with such a steady, slow, unchanging pulse. Like King Alfred's candle, her days were all notched into portions—an inch for the clothing club, another for the Sunday school, two for that great business of making unwilling ends meet. But the best dip has only a certain illuminating power, and as it burned low in its daily socket a good deal had to be squeezed in—leisure to read to her father, whose eyes were failing him, leisure to poke out her own over the darning of stockings and the turning of gowns and coats. Little wonder that the wick spluttered and

went out before there was any time for what Lilith designated a "personal" life.

Lilith was a great upholder of the right to one's own individuality. She spoke of it as "sacred," of its cultivation as a duty (with a big *D*). She said once, when Janey's steady diligence had more pungently than usual rebuked her own idleness, that, though she had striven to do her part as a wife—of course she didn't expect Janey to understand what *that* implied—dear Charlie had never wished her to surrender her own personality and become a mere echo, a mere machine. She mixed her metaphors a little, but, as Janey was not clever, it did not matter. He had allowed her to live her own life, as every thinking being ought to do. He certainly had, though not perhaps because she was a thinking being.

"Dear Charlie!" said Janey, her face flushed with a gentle pride and tender regret. "Dear Charlie, he was always so good."

Janey had an aquiline profile, like her father, but it did not give her that appearance of strength which we usually associate with a large nose. Hers was not the conquering type of face; its expression, on the contrary, was gentle, pleasing, timid. Her bearing matched it; her longness—she had a long back and long arms—did not give her the advantage of height, for she stooped and poked, and moved a little awkwardly.

"And so you see," said Lilith, rather sharply, "you ought really to give yourself a little time for relaxation, Janey. It is very narrowing to be always

absorbed in work, work, work, like that poor creature who stitched the shirts in the poem. One feels sorry for her, but *you* are different. It would really be quite a relief to see you take up a book sometimes."

Under all the elaborate draperies of affectation there lay in Lilith's nature a naked strength of selfishness—sharp, firm, unwavering. The only way to render life even remotely tolerable in this dreary corner of England was to ignore the too manifest signs of poverty visible on every side, to shut her eyes to the obvious fact that her presence was an additional strain upon a very unelastic income.

Janey was eagerly willing to aid and abet her. It would have hurt the gentle creature if Lilith had refused the chop on her plate because her hosts made a brave pretence of preferring cold meat; she would have shrunk sensitively, as from a crime, if any one had discovered that she had stripped her bed of blankets that her sister-in-law might lie warm. The same fine, delicate pride that was as much part of her as her blood or her nerves made her bear Lilith's reproof now in silence. It was so much better Lilith should think she let her mind lie wilfully uncultivated than that she should be made uncomfortable by the knowledge that Janey sat up half the night to stem the ever rising tide of "mendings." She had a fond belief, sweet soul, that Lilith, who could tell you what any woman she passed in the street had on, from the lining of her skirt to the make of her boots, would not perceive that her own best dress had been once turned and twice dyed, or that the vicar's

cassock had been fashioned at home by her patient hands out of her dear dead mother's black silk. She only said now, with a shy smile :

"It was such a pleasure to look forward to your coming—and now—to have you here—it would be selfish to want more. If only the dear little baby——"

Lilith shrank back with a sudden hardening of her face, and Janey, shocked at her own thoughtlessness, got down creakingly on her knees, her long back bending over Lilith in a passion of distressed remorse.

"Oh, forgive me! forgive me!" she said. "I think of her so often; but it was inconsiderate of me to speak of her as I did. I did not think what it must mean to you who have lost her."

"You are very cruel"—Lilith put two shaking hands over her face—"cruel to remind me when I was trying to forget."

Janey, in her self-abasement, was stricken dumb. She was by nature a comforter, as many a poor soul knew, but for such a sorrow as this she had no words. How could she penetrate to that desolation mothers feel when little feet have worn a way across their hearts in journeying towards the Far Country? Janey was only one of the mistakes of careless Nature, who, in her haste, so often puts souls into the wrong envelopes. She was an old maid, though God had designed her for motherhood. How could she understand? And she was the more self-accusatory because the chance word so carelessly sped had revealed unsus-

pected depths of feeling in Lilith. Sometimes it had almost seemed as if she had not greatly mourned that little lost child; "but I have been unjust," said Janey to herself. "I have been a cruel judge." She leaned forward in her shy, emotional way, and kissed the little white hands upon which sparkling rings were shining. Two tears, far more beautiful in her eyes than the rings, were shining there too.

"Poor Lilith! Dear Lilith! I have made you cry!"

Lilith shrank petulantly from the touch of those soft lips.

"Oh, go away, go away! You always say the wrong thing. You've brought it all back," she said between her sobs. "Go and leave me."

Janey got up, very slowly, with a white, grieved face. Her little bundle of account books was scattered on the floor, and in her hot repentance and haste to atone she had knocked over a flower-glass that held a late Christmas-rose or two. She picked them up mechanically. The flowers were bruised where she had knelt on them inadvertently. And Lilith (not inadvertently) had knelt on her contrition and crushed the life out of it too.

She lingered a moment awkwardly, and then she had an inspiration.

"Shall I make you a cup of tea?" she asked.

She had soon learned that creature comforts went a good long way towards consoling the smaller woes of Lilith Shore's life—perhaps the larger, too.

"Yes, yes!" cried Lilith eagerly. "Go and make



it at once—just one cup in the little brown teapot. You have given me a headache, and the tea may do it good.”

“If it were only a headache!” Janey sighed to herself, moving away reluctantly.

Lilith quivered with wild impatience in the chair.

“Will she never go and leave me alone?” she was saying inwardly.

Why was she in such haste to be alone? What was she striving to forget? Not the pale, quiet little child whom she had never pretended to love or to mourn, but the new picture of herself that every mention of Lilla brought up before her mental vision—the self she had been compelled to look in the eyes in moments when it had been beyond even her strongly controlled will to be blind. She was facing it now, and Janey’s presence was a torture.

For this was what had happened. In that long, dreary drive to the vicarage, a month earlier, the question had started up—“How shall I tell them about the child?” She had been too wholly absorbed in her own wretchedness before to consider it, and it found her unprepared with any answer. She was not the kind of woman who could plot and plan out any deliberate course of action beforehand; but a long habit of yielding to the baser elements within—a long, slow dying towards the higher nature, made it inevitable how she would choose if choice were given her. And chance, as she knew within an hour of her arrival, was on her side.

They took no daily paper at Little Laver. It was

one of the small renunciations that had been made so long ago that it had almost ceased to be one, so that tidings from the outer world came to this little parish, nine miles from any station, almost as tardily as to some remote island of the sea. The news of the disaster to the *St. George* first reached the vicar when the one day excitement it had created in the London press had subsided. The story, summarised from the town dailies, was printed at length in the *Melchisford Chronicle*, a weekly sheet which his churchwarden, Mr. Walters, took in. The paper enlivened the churchwarden's Saturday meals (not going without its share), and was duly handed to the vicar in the vestry after Sunday evening church.

The account which Mr. Shore read, or rather which his daughter read to him, both sitting in his little den of a study, and in the excitement forgetting wholly the day and the hour alike, moved and touched the simple pair greatly. Janey had to fetch another pocket-handkerchief from her bedroom before she could finish the paragraph about the little girl who died, so it was said, from the effects of shock and exposure in the open boat. It was a sad blow, and they mourned together; but the sorrow of the vicar for the unknown grandchild gave a new impulse to his welcome of the unknown daughter-in-law.

Janey's sisterly affection needed no such spur. Lilith came the next day, preceded by Darnaway's telegram, which, however, guessing its purport, Mr. Shore was obliged to refuse. There were no spare coins in the vicarage purse for portorage.

The beautiful, drooping young woman in mourning, widowed and childless, as her crape seemed to cry aloud, was indeed a sight to touch any good man's heart. She was quivering like a fragile reed under the wind's adversity, and shaken by what seemed a very natural emotion to the man who had lost his own eldest-born; and though not naturally a very effusive person, the vicar put a hand on her shoulder and kissed her with parental tenderness.

"Ah, my dear," he said, "God has stricken you sorely: first the husband of your youth—my dear, dear son—and now your child."

"Yes," Lilith assented, almost inaudibly.

"Poor little one! poor lost lamb! It grieves me to think you were compelled to commit her little body to the deep; it would have consoled you to lay her here, under the daisies of our churchyard; but you could not know rescue was so near. She did not suffer, I trust? And yet—to die in the open boat—almost within sight of land! It is one of those mysteries of God we profanely call cruel, not seeing the tender mercy behind it. Perhaps, my dear, you might have clung too wholly to the human, and it was to draw you more closely to Himself that God took back this sweet gift of His."

The vicar had fallen into his preaching vein, forgetting to whom he spoke. He had so long been used to round off every circumstance of life with a platitude that he may be forgiven. He meant very well. But he was unfortunate in having one of those high, thin voices, at once husky and shrill, which

mentally jar the nerves of a listener, and, in the unbalanced condition of her mind, Lilith could not bear it. She felt as if she must shriek. She began to sob hysterically.

"Oh, father, don't!" cried Janey, for the first time, perhaps, in her blameless life daring to remonstrate with this revered parent. "You are killing her!"

She put her long, thin arms round Lilith, all crape and tears, and strained her close.

"My dear, my dear!" she whispered, "she went straight from your arms to the dear Christ who loves little children, and what does it matter where her little body lies?"

Could malignity itself have invented a worse torture than this that selfless love was inflicting?

The room turned round with Lilith, giddy and nerveless, faint and spent. She could not have lifted her head from Janey's shoulder if she would. Had they seen her face, would they—would they have guessed——?

She asked herself this question half an hour later as she stood before the little mirror in her bedroom, her hands clenched at her sides. She was daring it to betray her, the face that was so beautiful still, in spite of the self-pity and the rebellion and the fear that had left it white and drawn. Fear was uppermost now, and it gave her eyes that hunted look they had worn that night when she turned from all those other staring, relentless eyes in the boat to Darnaway.

Suddenly she flung herself down by the bed and burst into a great storm of sobbing.

"I did not lie!" she cried, making a wild appeal to some dimly apprehended power she called God to protect her from herself. "They took the words out of my mouth; they had made up their minds, and I did not undeceive them. It would be too cruel. And they would turn from me; they would not understand that it was—an accident. How could I explain? They would say it was impossible. They would not think of *my* suffering, the torture I went through that dreadful, dreadful night, with all those eyes staring—staring, and afterwards, when that man——" She sobbed and shivered at the remembrance. "But I will never, never swerve from the straight path again. I will do whatever they wish. I will be simple and good. I will give them my money—the money poor Charlie left me. I will wear plain things and do my hair straight; Janey shall have some of my new dresses; I will be a sister to her and a daughter to poor Charlie's father——" Already the brief paroxysm was over; her mind, soothed by the contemplation of its own virtue, forgot that spectre of terror it had conjured up a moment ago—"If they should find out!" She sought a more comfortable angle for her head and knelt on, making with many vows her bargain with God.

"Save me this once, and I will walk in Thy steps all the rest of my days."

Is it so impossible a prayer on your lips—on mine—that we dare fling the condemning stone?

For a day or two contrition kept its hot-foot pace, spurred by many a darting fear; for the vicar, who

had got to an age when the memory is treacherous in its hold of all but things of large import, forgot his daughter's admonitions and recurred often to the child's pitiful fate. The catastrophe, coming so close as it did to his own life, made a deep impression on his mind. It was natural, perhaps, that he should expect Lilith to grieve in the same way that he did, spreading over the wound the balm of many words. When life runs on one monotonous, unvarying round, people are apt to grow either very silent or very garrulous. The vicar was a great talker of little nothings, in that high, thin voice of his that gave them no new force.

But as the weeks passed and nothing happened to justify her terror, Lilith's penitence began to wear thin and lose its nap. No slightest suspicion crossed the minds of father or daughter; no one from the outside came to stir into life that poor little bygone tragedy. The disaster to the *St. George* had been long swept into the world's lumber-room, and the bacon and tea-stained sheet which Janey read aloud by the light of a single candle was bristling and bubbling over and spluttering its indignation at a Great Power's menace of War.

"I wish Mr. Walters weren't a Radical," said the vicar, sighing; "it is discomposing to a good Conservative to listen to those foolish diatribes against the Government. But that is ungrateful; we should wait a long time for our general news if we refused it except at the hands of an editor of the right views. How did those questions affect you in South



Australia, my dear?" he turned to his daughter-in-law.

Lilith did not know and did not care.

"I remember my poor boy saying——" he began, perhaps for her information, and then for a quarter of an hour he plied about with a gentle zest among the shallows of his mind, fishing up a recollection here and there, or an anecdote, to which he fitted a ready-made moral. Janey knew by heart most of her father's discourses upon the obvious; she could almost have told you when he opened his mouth what he would say; but she always listened with sweet pleasantness. Lilith never listened at all. She hated the little, stuffy room, the one candle: Janey's long nose poking over the dirty little paper, Janey's even voice droning on and on through the Parliamentary news and the war news and the police news and brightening when, after this conscientious course of solids, the sweets of local news were reached. Mr. Shore brightened too, and rubbed first his hands and then his thin hair. After all, the hot war over the water question of Melchisford came a good deal closer to him than the chances of a conflict with Russia over the Indian frontier. For he went to Melchisford every Tuesday, borne thither in Mr. Walter's spring cart, to hold a service at the Magdalen Asylum, and he only knew Russia as a geographical expression.

As Lilith began to feel secure that the volcano would not give way under her feet, a hot unrest took possession of her. Her whole nature rose in rebellion,



in passionate repudiation of her sufferings. For she did suffer. Her self-respect had been torn from her, as the Indian tears the scalp from his victim, only she had to live on with the blistering, bleeding wound. Every nerve in her body quivered as she remembered the insult Rollo had offered her that morning on the moors. He had dared! He had dared! The blood rushed up to her face and ebbed again, leaving her sick. Oh, if Charlie had been there! Charlie would never have let her be insulted; he would have believed in her; he would have been sorry for her. They had all turned against her, even Mr. Darnaway, though he had tried to be kind.

And here, if they knew, they would be against her too. "Would it matter so very much?" recklessness sometimes asked, breaking through all other considerations. It could scarcely be worse than this deadly dull monotony, this life that was all one long, long grey cheerless day. Sometimes she felt as if she must hurl the whole tale of her wrongs, her sufferings into the stagnant air, as a cannon is sometimes fired to break the thunder-cloud. Ah, better to drown under the pitiless storm from heaven, than to die gaspingly for lack of one free breath.

And even such paltry scraps of pleasure as might come in her way were forbidden her. There was nothing to call Society in the village; the congregation was a congregation of boors; but the churchwarden, boor as he also was, was a man of substance, whose table, as Janey had impressed on her, groaned under a rough abundance. Yet when he included

her pointedly, with an evident approval of her beauty and charm, in an invitation extended to the family to dine at his house, Mr. Shore, without so much as consulting her, at once refused.

"Thank you very much, Walters," he said ; "it is very good of you to ask us, but my daughter-in-law is in mourning still, you see, and she goes nowhere."

"I could have eaten my dinner there as well as here, in a black gown," she said afterwards to her sister-in-law, "and by your own showing, Janey, it would have been a better dinner."

Little stabs such as these made Janey shrink under her meagre serge bodice.

"Did you want to go?" she faltered.

"Did I want to come out of my grave!" Lilith cried, extending her arms and then letting them drop with a hopeless gesture at her side. "When we lost our first baby, Charlie took me out. He said I wanted rousing. We went everywhere; we even went down to Adelaide for the Governor's garden party. I wore black over white, and a black hat. I am not quite heartless, as I daresay you think me, Janey; but to my mind there is something morbid, and even what you might call not quite refined, in clinging to the outward signs of grief." She looked down with distaste upon her black cashmere—that cashmere which had been bought at Exeter with John Darnaway's money, and had never fitted her. "And I have always thought that people who shut themselves up after a bereave-

ment are very, very selfish. One ought to make an effort to rouse oneself—for other people's sake."

"We can still dine at the farm," said Janey, gravely. "Mr. Walters is very good-tempered; he will not mind if we say we have changed our plans. Papa has arranged to go to the rurideaconal meeting, but you and I could go—if you wish it."

Janey's eyes said what her faltering lips could never have compassed. Gentle, serious eyes they were, darkened now with perplexed, wistful questioning. They said as plainly as possible (but Lilith was examining the buckle of her pointed shoe and did not look up), "I don't understand you," and the feeling that there was anything to probe or search out was a pain to Janey, who thought, in her simplicity, that human nature was a thing upon which you could always reckon. Her own share of it, indeed, would have behaved with perfect propriety in Lilith's circumstances. She would have made no parade of her grief, but still less would she have held it capable of being assuaged by turkey and syllabub. She knew by painful experience that any direct mention of the lost child would throw Lilith into a state of nervous agitation, and yet she talked of coloured clothes and parties and the duties one owed to society. Was self-forgetting even to this extent indeed a duty? Was it she who was selfish in not realising this?

"Your father would object," said Lilith, moodily. "You've both been buried here so long, you don't understand the ways of the living world."

"Papa wouldn't wish to deprive you of any pleasure," said Janey, colouring. "I will explain. He will be glad for us to go."

"Oh, well," said Lilith, letting a little good temper creep into her tone again, "it is not that *I* wish it so much, but it would be good for you, Janey. You are a dreadful stay-at-home. Poor Charlie used to say of the squatters and settlers in the bush that they got to 'think mutton'! I'm afraid you 'think mutton' too, Janey!"

"It will be a change to eat it without thinking of it," said Janey, making a valiant attempt to meet this playful sally in a responsive spirit. "Perhaps I had better write to Mr. Walters now."

"No," said Lilith, who was in no humour to be left alone while Janey composed the note she would spend half an hour over—she was always so slow—"you can send it after supper. Come up to my room, and let us look over those clothes I sent to town for. They're all *coloured*: black is such extravagant wear for a poor person; it's a mistake to get more than you can just do with; but there's a lavender that we might run up on the machine before Thursday. And I'm sure there's a blouse that with a little letting out at the waist would just fit you. You are what the shop people call 'stock size.' I, unfortunately, am far too slight. Come up and let us have a rummage!"

Janey went resignedly, but with an inward protest against the blouse. She had a stocking pulled over her hand, which she was darning, and she took it and the ball of darning stuff with her.

Lilith's room was under the roof, but had been given her because it was the largest in the small house, running its whole length. Already it had gathered about it many extraneous comforts and luxuries. With the money she had recovered from the Insurance Company for her luggage, Lilith had restored as far as she could her lost splendours.

"The toilet table looks dreadfully bare," she said, with apology to the visitor ; "but when I get my silver things it will look better. I am having the brushes made the exact pattern of those poor Charlie gave me. It is rather old-fashioned, but I couldn't bear any other."

"Charlie was—very generous."

Charlie's sister said it unenviously, and yet she thought, with a momentary pang, of his father tramping about his scattered parish in winter snow and slush without a great-coat. There were disregarded trifles upon that table Lilith called "bare" which would have bought many great-coats.

But Lilith's eye, travelling discontentedly over it, suddenly lit on her dressing-case.

"I have never shown you my jewellery," she said. "I'll show it you before we begin on the frocks."

Janey had seated herself sideways on the low, broad window-sill to make a lap for her scissors, and her sister-in-law now lifted the large morocco case and placed it on the seat beside her. It had her initials on the top and a Bramah lock for which she produced the key out of her purse.

"It was a wedding-present," she said, "and almost

all that it contains I have had given me too. I have been very lucky in the way of presents, and just as well, for Charlie could not give me any. We were very poor, you know ; he never had any luck, poor fellow. But his friends liked me. I am glad to think now that they *all* liked me. They made so much of me ! ”

“ Yes ! ” said Janey, the pain going out of her heart. It was not Charlie who had let his father go bare to buy these pretty trifles. She could admire now with all her simple warmth.

It was a wonderful display, this collection of trophies. Except in a jeweller’s window she had never seen so many flashing stones : rings, chains, necklets, deep wells of light for the sun to play with.

“ Do you carry these about with you ? ” she asked, in an awestruck voice. “ Is it safe ? If you should be robbed ! ”

“ Burglars would never come *here*, ” said Lilith, confidently ; “ you haven’t even electro-plate, and they wouldn’t trouble to take it if you had. I always feel my trinkets are safest under my own eyes. Besides, I like to wear them. I love pearls ; they are considered very becoming when one is fair. ” She lifted the string and held it against her cheek. “ I love my die-dies ! ” she smiled in entire forgetfulness of her worries and her woes. “ I’m afraid, as I said to the Bishop I met on board, I love them too well ! ”

“ I never had any, ” said Janey, and added, in all sincerity, “ but then I am not pretty. ”

“ And you are not married, ” said Lilith, putting



back in its case a ring she had been polishing with her handkerchief. "That makes a difference. Unmarried people need so little in the way of dress. I must get those sapphires Major Ainslie gave me set. It is rather tiresome, for I'm afraid it will cost a good deal. Some people have that way of giving half a present—a cushion you've got to make up, or a cosy to line. I call it inconsiderate. What's this?" she picked up a little pasteboard box and untied the string. "I declare, I don't know my own property!" The lifted lid revealed a coral necklace. Lilith's face changed subtly as she stared at it. The strong spring sun, looking into the room as it went westwards and touching Janey's brown hair to find the gold threads in it, seemed suddenly to pale and grow sickly; the heaped-up gems on the table lost their liquid fire. She drew a difficult breath.

"How pretty!" said Janey, noticing nothing. "Was it——" she bit her lip. "It is like—the one mamma wears in the miniature of her as a child," she said, speaking in some confusion.

Lilith leaned towards her, one hand resting on the table. "It is—for you," she said. "Take it."

"For me?" Janey shrank back. "Oh, you don't mean—you didn't buy it for *me*, surely!"

"It was bought—at Naples," said Lilith, speaking as if the words came with difficulty. Suddenly, to Janey's surprise, she slid down on her knees and put her elaborate head on the serge lap, with the stockings, the mending-wool and the scissors.

"Oh, I'm so tired!" she said, "so tired! I wish



you understood me, Janey. I am very lonely. I have no one to care for me now, no one to—defend me, and—I'm not so frivolous as you think."

"Hush!" whispered Janey, laying soft hands on the hair that was gold already, without the sun's co-operation. "I love you, dear sister, and always will." In the silence that followed, her soft heart travelled in leaps and bounds towards this picturesque penitent. It could never wholly retrace that impulsive journey, never quite take back the gift of love it gave in that sunset hour.

By and by Lilith stirred and looked up.

"You must take the necklace, Janey. You have never let me give you anything, not even an old frock. There!" she thrust the box into Janey's hand and closed the long fingers about it. "Now it is yours."

"It pleases the poor thing," she said to herself as she rose and began to touch up her disordered hair at the glass. "It isn't real pink coral—he was too mean to pay for that—only a light red, and—I could never have borne the sight of it."

"They were bought for little Lilla," said Janey, also to herself, as she slipped the beads round her throat at night as she was undressing. They did not look at all well on her lean, brown neck, but nobody would ever suspect their existence under her high, stiff collar.

And lying there, rising and falling with every beat of her heart, they made a voiceless plea which never failed for Lilla's mother.

## CHAPTER X

### LILITH PLANS FLIGHT

JANEY Shore possessed one great treasure—a friend of her too short London school days, who wrote to her once a week.

This friend, an entire, almost a violent contrast to her in every way, represented to Janey the world and the flesh in their most seductive guise, and if also the devil, then only a very little one, and so disguised that the good Janey scarcely perceived his cloven foot. Janey's friend shone, if not as a star, then at least as an electric light in what is called the "best" society, and, having "rushed" and "torn" and "flown" (to quote herself) through six days of the week, rested for ten minutes on the seventh to chronicle the campaign.

The vicar took as much interest as Janey in her friend's weekly budget. To both of those unworldly babes it was as absorbing as the very latest and liveliest of novels. If he came down first, as he sometimes did, he would practice an innocent jest that never palled, hiding the letter under the bread platter, or slipping it inside a circular, and pretending to sympathise in Janey's distress at its non-arrival.

"How idiotic!" thought Lilith. She thought most things idiotic that interested other people.

Janey (who took no bacon) was expected to read the letter aloud as a relish to the very minute rasher on her father's plate; but she generally prolonged the pleasure by giving a summary of the contents to begin with.

"Katherine is going to Germany," she announced one morning: "she says she is imposing this penance on herself because she has just refused the most eligible offer she is ever likely to have."

"Now, I wonder who that was?" said Mr. Shore, going over in his mind the various personages who had scampered through Miss Marjoribanks' letters. "Your Miss Katherine is ambitious, Janey. Could it be Lord Portrush?"

Janey gave a little gurgle of amusement, her eyes glued to the letter. "It was Mr. Skipworth, the tea and bacon man, the 'glorified grocer' she calls him! Isn't that like Katherine? I see she says: 'We shall probably go later to Ober Ammergau; that, you understand, won't be penitential; rather profitable, I hope. We worldlings are all setting our feet on that pilgrimage.'"

"Ober Ammergau," said the vicar, pleased with his own profundity; "that is where they have revived the Passion Play."

"What is the Passion Play?" enquired Lilith, waking out of her languor. The name attracted her: there was life in it.

"The Passion Play"—began the vicar, instantly

retiring to the twelfth century and looking down the long staircase of time with a pleasurable sense that there were a great many steps for his leisurely feet to tread—"the Passion Play may be said"—etc., etc.

When he got to the reign of "the Great Eliza," about four steps down, he stopped to eat a triangle of toast and marmalade. Lilith wished he would forget to come any further. Her little spring of interest had quite died out, and the vicar's thin, high voice lifted up about mummers and miracle plays irritated her. He really knew a great deal about his subject, but he made the mistake of giving the sermon instead of the text. But when he said :

"Though there is no reason to doubt that the Ober Ammergau peasants act their several parts with all reverence, I cannot personally approve of the dramatisation of Scripture," she revised her verdict. If the vicar thought the Passion Play wrong, it must certainly be interesting.

"I wish I were going," she said to herself. She wished herself away every day of her life, somewhere, anywhere if it were only beyond the parish of Little Laver. She had hinted more than once of her wish to go, but when her father- and sister-in-law had looked at her in astonishment and asked "where?" she had no answer ready.

Usually Miss Marjoribanks' letter offered the one excitement of the postal week ; the interest for the remaining days being chiefly centred in circulars, clerical notices and catalogues. Janey had a confessed weakness for the catalogues, especially when

they were illustrated. They did not bring home to her her poverty ; they offered a delightful selection of all the things she would like to give and wear and eat and read if she were rich. And, like the gentleman who felt that he had gone a long way towards discharging his bills when he had filed them, it gave Janey a sensation of wealth only to see how much you could get for a ten pound note.

But this week was destined to be marked by a second event, a large and unexpected event. On Thursday the vicar was the recipient of a letter which threw him into quite a flutter of excitement. It contained an invitation from the Bishop—his own particular Eastminster Bishop—to dine at the Palace to meet the Bishop of Wonneroo, “who,” so wrote his Right Reverence, “is, I understand, an old acquaintance of yours.”

The colour spread over Mr. Shore’s thin cheeks as he read ; the kindly worded note, this recognition of him in his individual rather than his official capacity, touched and pleased him.

“It was kind of him to recall that,” he said. “I remember speaking of Graham after the confirmation at Melchisford last year. The Bishop said they were at Oriel together, and he had followed Graham’s career with great interest. You remember my telling you about it, Janey ?”

“Yes,” said Janey, bringing her mind back from the cupboard in the room above, where it had taken an excursion out of her body to make a survey of her father’s coats and trousers. “You will accept ?”

"Certainly, my dear ; it would be discourteous not to do so, and it will be a great pleasure to meet Graham again. We were at Charterhouse together, and though he went to Oxford and I to Cambridge and our paths since then have diverged even more widely, we have never quite lost sight of each other, and I daresay we shall be able to pick up the old threads."

Janey seemed to listen with less than her usual single-heartedness ; but it was the voice inside she was hearkening to. ("If only he weren't so shabby ! If I had the linen, I could put new wristbands on his shirts before Monday. It would only mean sitting up a little later. I wonder if Mr. Walters would drive me into Melchisford ? The butcher's boy would take a note. Half a yard would do—half a yard at two shillings. . . .")

When Lilith came down, late as usual, the vicar must needs tell her of the invitation and his pleasure in its reception.

"By the by," he said, "as a West Australian, you ought to know Graham."

"Who ?" asked Lilith, more intent upon her breakfast than on her father-in-law.

"Bishop Graham, of Wonneroo."

The hand with which Lilith was cutting a slice from the crusty loaf suddenly swerved.

"I've cut myself !" she cried, looking at her finger, from which a drop of blood was oozing.

It was a very small cut, but Janey jumped up to fetch a rag and Mr. Shore was sympathetic. He

forgot his spiritual peers and masters for a moment while he enlarged on the advisability of keeping the air from a cut ; but when the rag had been adjusted round the wounded finger his mind skipped back to the absorbing topic, and he repeated his query.

"Yes," said Lilith, able to speak steadily now ; "I know him."

"I was sure you would !" cried Mr. Shore, who thought of Australia as a pocket-handkerchief of a place where you rubbed shoulders with everybody. (Is there an Australian born who, in this country, has not been constantly asked if he knows so and so in New Zealand ?) "As a fellow countryman and neighbour you could not help knowing him. And I can assure you, my dear, you are acquainted with a man whom it's an honour to call friend."

"I didn't know him out there. We weren't exactly neighbours. We were five hundred miles from Wonneroo."

"Dear me !" said the abashed vicar, and paused to digest his wonder.

"He was on board the *St. George*," Lilith forced herself to say. Her mind would not work. She looked desperately round her mental horizon and saw no opening for evasion. Its brazen sky closed in on every side.

"What an extraordinary coincidence !" cried the untravelled vicar, much impressed. "And you both, after crossing the ocean together, meet here in this quiet little corner ! I wonder, when you told him you were coming to Little Laver, it didn't occur to him



that we must be related? Shore is by no means a very common name. I am surprised he did not ask after his old schoolfellow."

"I don't suppose I told him I was coming here. I didn't suppose it would interest him to talk about you," said Lilith, feeling it a kind of relief to say something brutal.

"I daresay not," said the vicar gently, "and you didn't know of my interest in him."

"There were so many to talk to, and we spoke about indifferent things: the weather and the voyage, and so on," said Lilith, a little ashamed of herself. "Besides, he went ashore at Naples."

"Ah, that accounts for it! I was just reflecting that his name was not in the published list of passengers at that sad time. I couldn't have missed *that*. And the Bishop does say—let me see, where is the passage?" he adjusted his pince-nez and again examined the precious note. "Ah, yes! 'He is travelling for his health, and will be some time in this country, to secure complete rest.' No doubt he has been taking a little run through Italy, to avoid the cold spring winds. He must have been overworking, poor fellow! Did he strike you as looking ill?"

"I don't know. I think he was sea-sick."

"Well, Lilith, you will be able to renew the acquaintance, for he will certainly come to see you. And he will be very sorry when he hears——"

"Why need he know that I am here?" asked Lilith, at bay. "Unless you tell him, he need never know."

"But, my dear, Graham will be coming over anyhow. We must have him to dinner—or lunch. Perhaps lunch will be better," he said, catching a glimpse of Janey's perturbed face behind the tea-cosy. "And you can scarcely absent yourself. It would look so marked. I can understand your shrinking; but, much as I sympathise with your grief, my dear, I should not like a spirit of morbid despondency or rebellion against this decree of Providence to carry you so far——"

"Perhaps it had better carry me upstairs," said Lilith bitterly, feeling that at any cost she must escape.

How much it brought back—that name! how much that she panted to have restored! Those beautiful sunny days when she had been the one woman on board. The others counted for nothing: her place was so high above them that she scarcely even allowed herself to feel any triumph in a conquest so easy. She knew her beauty then. She knew her power; there was scarcely a man but would have paid a price for her smile, not one but thought himself honoured by a word. And now! The day was intensely hot, her attic bedroom suffocatingly so, yet she shivered. She felt like some outcast, looking in through the windows of her lost home.

Then the old fear came upon her: it took hold of her like a physical ill, and turned her faint. She grasped the bed-rail to steady herself. If Bishop Graham came—he would talk—he would *tell*. True, he had left the ship at Naples, but he might still

have met one or other of his fellow passengers : he might have met—Rollo. The world was so small, so small, that even here, in this forgotten corner, one could not hide. She put her throbbing head down against the cool iron bar. Once he had spoken to the child and asked her name, and Lilla, who would go to so few, had not been shy with him. He would not forget her : you could see in his face that he had the secret of winning children. He would question her about her loss ; he would sympathise—and how could she bear that ? How much less could she bear it if—he knew ! He was a good man ; he would not speak unkindly, but he would look—she had seen that very memorable look on his plain, unremarkable face before ; on the day the steerage passenger died. She did not wish to see it again.

“ Why did I not tell them that first night ! ” she wailed, the meshes of her deceit strangling her. “ If I had told them then, I *could* have explained. But now I have let them think one thing, and if he tells them another—” her imagination leapt out to picture what would happen. She could see Janey’s shocked eyes, the vicar’s silent, scarce comprehending gaze, even his fluency dried up for the moment. They would forgive her, no doubt ; but life without their respect, without the simple admiration which she accepted from Janey even while she despised it—with their continual unspoken criticism—would be intolerable afterwards.

God had been very cruel to her ; two smarting salt drops forced themselves between her lashes. She

had asked Him to save her : she had kept her part of the bargain : she had been good to Janey, she had given her things ; she had borne with the common food, the bare house, the deadly monotony, and yet He had not kept danger away from her : He had let it come near.

"I cannot bear it!" she said. "I must go away. They can't force me to stay. I have money: I will go."

With the thought a faint light illumined the darkness that had been spread all round her ; a thin ray as yet, but enough for her stumbling feet to follow. Yes, she would go. She roused herself presently, realising that she was stifling for breath in the hot room, and, taking a parasol, went downstairs. The dining-room door stood open, and a pungent odour of benzoin floated out and met her on the last steps of the stair. Janey was operating with a piece of flannel on a waistcoat spread on the bare table ; a little pile of garments at her side awaited their turn for purification.

"What a disgusting smell!" said Lilith, entering and sniffing disdainfully.

"I'm sorry," Janey flushed, "but the air will soon take it away. Go out into the garden and smell the violets instead : they are so plentiful this year."

"I'm going."

"Oh, Lilith," Janey called after her as she stepped from the open window, "I have to go into Melchisford this morning. Mr. Walters will take me, and I'm afraid—there won't be room for two."

Lilith turned her profile towards the window, her gaze fixed on the green fields.

"Well?" she questioned.

"Oh," said Janey humbly, "I only hoped you wouldn't mind being left alone. I'm afraid I can't be back for dinner, and this is papa's day for the other side of the parish. And I can't be home for tea either. Would you mind seeing that papa gets his when he comes in? He is so forgetful when he is left to himself, and he will be so tired with his long round."

"Yes, I will remember ; I will pour it out myself," said Lilith, with unusual graciousness. She drew a breath of relief at the thought that she had the whole day before her to think and plan.

It was a morning of rose and gold, one of those rarely perfect days in the young year which come like a swift runner to say that King Summer is close behind. The whites and yellows of May still crowned the spring, but the roses were getting ready for June. The birds were busy with the coronation song, fluting trills and runs ; the nightingale, *prima-donna* in the bird world, sang all by herself in the copse across the field. Mr. Walters' cows already stood knee deep in the Laver, switching prohibitory tails as a warning to the flies, but the flies would not be warned. They knew the day for one of feast and dance on gossamer wings, that thrum upon the deeper notes which helps the general chorus.

Lilith sat within the embrace of the yew tree hedge till gay morning drew towards drowsy noon. She

saw and heard nothing, but she stretched herself luxuriously in the warmth with the grace of a cat. The sun comforted her outwardly, but it did not reach the chill region of fear within.

Once her heart gave a beat of hope.

If she were to go to Bishop Graham—she could find a way—and tell him—everything? The idea pleased her: Beauty kneeling at the feet of Goodness, sorrow seeking comfort at the hands of a spiritual consoler. Her widow's dress (her hair looked beautiful under the crape veil), her widow's face—he could never resist her. She would tell him how unhappy she was: what a blight rested on her life; how all the happiness she had planned in coming home had been clouded over; and he would be kind, as he had been to that poor woman on board whose face was so disfigured with crying. He had liked her on board; there was a time when he had even more than liked her. She had seen the admiration in his eyes.

But all at once this house of cards fell at her feet. It was too great a risk. There were only two days, and one of them a Sunday, before the vicar set out on his visit, and the Palace was on the other side of Eastshire, and Little Laver nine miles from a train.

"I must go away, quite away," she reiterated, "but where?"

Suddenly into her vacant brain there darted a word:

"Ober Ammergau."

"It is the answer!" she cried. She started up

from her seat, sending a thrush which was murmuring his part while the rest of the orchestra was sleeping, away with a flutter and flurry of wings into the heart of the pear tree, and ran into the house.

In the vicar's study was an old atlas, guiltless of modern nomenclature, but good enough for Ober Ammergau, which is not of yesterday.

She dragged the dusty volume to the light and scanned the map of Germany till she found the spot.

"It is not so far away," she said, shutting the book and lightly flicking the dust from her skirt with a small pocket-handkerchief, "but it is far enough. I have the money, and I need not take all my boxes. By and by, if—if nothing happens, I may come back. I will go the day the vicar leaves, after he is safely away. I suppose, since I must order a carriage, I'll have to tell Janey, and she will make a fuss. If only I had an excuse that sounded probable! But can I help it if I haven't?

"It is cruel that I should be led into this—very cruel. But I am the helpless victim of fate."

The phrase sounded so good and reassuring that she repeated and amended it:

"The helpless victim of an unkind fate."



## CHAPTER XI

### A MEETING IN PARIS

DARNAWAY stood on the steps of the hotel, and up those steps to meet him, in bright contentment with himself and with all his world, came that young son of Anak, Tosh Hazlett.

It was Paris—gay, bewitching Paris—and Tosh had been out spending money.

To be twenty-one, broad-chested, blue-eyed, yellow-haired, comely in the eyes of women, unknowing ache or pain, with money in the pocket to spend and people far and near to spend it on: *Tiens!* This is no stepmother world to some people.

"I've been taking a look round," said Tosh. "That Rue de Rivoli is stunning. I'd like to cut a section out of it, that bit with the jewellers' shops and the caps and fal-de-lals, and send it straight off to the mater to plant out in the home paddock. My oath! Wouldn't it just make her jump!"

"This is sheer recklessness," said Darnaway. "I shall have to take you by the sleeve and lead you beyond temptation."

"The worst of it is," said Tosh ruminatingly, hunting for his pipe, "you can never tell what a

woman will fancy, even if she's your own mother. I consider that I'm educating the mater's taste—and the old man's too—by the selection I'm sending home; but I'll bet you anything when I get back to Maccoomba she'll be wearing some old rag I've known by sight for years."

"If you carry out your present programme of travel she'll have worn out the Rue de Rivoli and be compelled to fall back on her old wardrobe before you reach Maccoomba again."

"Never you fear! she'll have every blessed gown and tucker locked away in her wardrobe in dust sheets as 'too good to wear,' and whoever inherits them will think them 'not fit to wear.' That's the way of woman."

"Apparently they don't hand it down to their sons." Darnaway looked significantly at Tosh's smart suit. "If you want feminine advice, I daresay I can secure it for you. Miss Skelton has arrived, and I'm going to call. You'd better come along."

"I like feminine advice in a general sort of way, especially when I don't need to take it, and I like Miss Skelton," said Tosh with deliberation. "I liked her as well as any of the mob I met in London, though I thought them all very jolly; but, for the moment, I like Paris better."

"I can't trust you out of my sight. The Australian landed interest is being imperilled."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Tosh, with his boy's laugh. "I'll throw in a church or two, to please you; there's a few hundreds of them to do, and you can't loot

them. I want to see if I can find my way about. I forgot to chip the trees this morning and I found myself bushed, and when I asked a chap the road back here, in his own *parlez-vous*, he had the cheek to say he didn't understand me."

"You had better write to the *Times*. That's the Englishman's remedy for every grievance, when he can't or won't use his fists."

"Well, I'm not English, so I just said to him 'Look here, my son, if you don't understand your own lingo I wonder what you were born for,' and the beggar lifted his hat and smiled. That's the way to treat those Froggies. Just you tell them quietly and dispassionately what you think of them and they'll knuckle under at once. They would be no sillier than other nations if they were properly sat upon."

"I will remember the recipe."

"Just wait half a second and I'll walk along with you. I've forgotten my baccy. I'll be with you before you can say 'knife.'"

They walked together to the Continental, where Miss Skelton was staying, Tosh discoursing upon many things. Suddenly—*apropos* of nothing that had gone before—he said :

"Miss Skelton is rather good-looking."

Darnaway smiled his amusement. Young Tosh, who had had the run of Miss Skelton's spacious old house in Portland Place, had "cottoned" to her, to quote himself; but, a little to Darnaway's surprise, he had not imagined himself in love with her. As she was at least twelve years his senior, lively, agreeable,

very well dressed, he ought by all the rules of all the novels Darnaway had ever read to have fallen prone at her feet.

But the novelist's recipe for the young and tender passion is apparently not infallible, for here was young Tosh saying: "she isn't bad-looking," which is certainly not what he would have said if he had thought her adorable.

"She would no doubt be flattered by your Royal Highness's approval," said Darnaway grimly.

"I was thinking," Tosh replied, in that easy, slow way of his, "that she couldn't compare in looks with your other friend of the *St. George*—the young widow. *She* was beautiful."

Darnaway felt himself this time disagreeably disturbed, but he hid the outward manifestations of his discomposure.

"Yes," he assented; "as I agreed with you before, Mrs. Shore is a beautiful woman. (She isn't a friend of mine, by the way, though that's a detail); but Tosh"—it cost him an effort to put that foot upon the pulpit stairs—"when a man sets out to choose his friendships among women, there's something that should stand in the first order, even before beauty."

"Yes, I know," said Tosh, heartily: "Miss Skelton is awfully good, and as jolly and as clever as they make them; but you see, when a chap comes across a perfect face, he doesn't get thinking much beyond the fact that it *is* perfect."

"Not when he is twenty-one," said Darnaway to himself with a sigh.

"Here we are. No, I won't come in. I'll have a little trot round. Tell Miss Skelton if she's to be at home to-morrow I'll look in about tea-time."

"I will prepare her for the honour."

The two friends had seen a good deal of each other in London, when Darnaway took that sudden flight from Edinburgh. It had been his intention to set out for Germany at once, but Tosh, whom he was minded to take with him, had not yet become staled with the pleasures of the world's greatest city, so they lingered on through the first weeks of spring when the pulse of life is at its fullest beat, and everything puts on the gaiety of youth. For even in London the houses wear clean, shining faces in May-time, and in back streets there are splashes of pure gold on the coster's barrow.

Miss Skelton smiled to see Darnaway come back so soon, but she did not say to him: "I told you so." Which, considering her sex, showed a fine power of self-restraint. She did her best, instead, to make the time pleasant for him and succeeded very well, for in her way she was a small power in her own set, a substantial person who entertained and had many acquaintances. She had intended, as he knew, to go abroad before the season was over, but it was possible the direction of her travels was in some measure guided by his. She liked him, and where Mary Skelton liked any person, she saw no reason for not enjoying as much of that person's society as it pleased her to appropriate. The fact that he was a man and she a woman, and both of them unmarried, counts for

nothing in these days, for though it would once have made Mrs. Grundy's hair stand on end, the approbation of that potentate is no longer of importance.

It was accordingly by her counsel that they set out for Munich by way of Paris.

"I shall very likely see you there," she promised, and her note of yesterday was the result of that promise.

He found her alone in a private sitting-room which she had already made pretty with flowers. The inevitable gilt clock ticked beneath a bower of orchids; roses, white and yellow, did their best to tone the crimson upholstery.

They met with the frankest sort of cordiality.

"You are not alone?" he asked. "Your aunt—your cousins——"

"No, I'm not alone, but my aunts and cousins are left behind. My relatives, you know, 'are very good sort of people to be unconnected with.'"

He smiled, for he had seen some of those relatives—the over-zealous, over-eager "people" of a rich spinster.

"I have brought Mrs. Dewar with me. Did you meet her, I wonder? I call her granny, but she is a sprightly young lady of seventy, and I am carefully chaperoning her; for though, like those self-sacrificing maids and companions who advertise, she has 'no objection to travel,' she does it chiefly to demonstrate how much more comfortable it is to stay at home. So I look after her like a dragon, in case her candid criticisms should offend the powers that be!"

"If her French is no better than Tosh's, it will pass for the language of compliment."

"How is the delightful Tosh? Why didn't he come to see me?"

They had met too often not to have overcome in large measure that first shrinking from the circumstance that had drawn them together, and had laid a constraint on them even while it united them by closer ties. But, in spite of some light rejoinder from him, she saw the faint shadow on his face, and perhaps it was her quick sympathy—that wireless telegraphy of friendship—that sent her thoughts instantly back to that poor, unforgotten little tragedy.

He had told her of the impression Lilith Shore had made upon Tosh at Waterloo, and he now repeated his remark about her beauty.

"I thought he had forgotten," he said. "I had nearly succeeded in forgetting her myself."

"I daresay he has forgotten all but the fact that she was the prettiest woman he had ever seen. I can well believe she was that. She was perfect after her own type; but, though we keep telling each other that the world is a very little ball, it is big enough, after all, to keep those two apart."

"I couldn't tell him," he said, frowning at the stove. "That would be—as he would say—playing it rather low down."

"No," she said, "you couldn't. And you wouldn't, even if they were to meet—even if he were to fall in love with her, which is very probable. I couldn't count so surely on my own magnanimity, so we'll hope there will be no encounter!"



"You've never heard of her since—from any of the others?"

"Never a word. As for the others, they are scattered to the four winds, Mr. Rollo, perhaps, excepted. He was only blown to London. But we don't revolve round the same orbit there. He has reached the stage in the social climb when it behoves him to be excessively careful whom he knows. You have to, when you start from a basis of beer or stocks, and as I myself am only iron, the honour of meeting him is not for me."

"I suppose," he said, his thoughts wrenched violently in Lilith Shore's direction and still busy with her, "I suppose she is still in that little place in Essex?"

"I daresay. I think about her as seldom as possible, but I have blamed myself a hundred times for not remembering the poor child."

"Blame yourself—you—when her own mother was there?"

"Yes, but I have been telling myself, since, that one had no right to count on feelings that it was plain had no existence. There's too much talk of motherhood, as if the mere physical act of childbirth confers on a woman that supreme power of self-abnegation that is the mainspring of mother-love."

"'I thought a child was given to sanctify  
A woman, set her in the sight of all  
The clear-eyed Heavens, a chosen minister  
To do their business, and lead spirits up  
The difficult blue heights,'"

he said. "I don't remember who that's by, but I remember being struck with it when I read it in camp on the plains. It sounded true."

"A poet's dream! I daresay it sounded true—in the bush, where there was nothing to contradict it. The dumb beasts are at least faithful to their trust. It's true of *some* women, undoubtedly, the rare best, but it's just as absurd to expect that the mere fact of motherhood will range a woman on the side of the angels as to believe that because a man becomes a clergyman he will never say anything foolish. There are silly vicars and there are unmotherly mothers in abundance, and I ought to have remembered that."

"You have no right to reproach yourself," he said firmly, "or, if you have, the fault was even more mine."

"No. You had a man's work to do, but I was helping other women and children who needed me so much less! Well, it was to be, I suppose, and one's after thoughts are as worthless as most second-hand things. I'm only inflicting mine on you because, if ever I see her again—as I hope I never shall!—I should like to bear in mind as something to balance the loathing she wakes in me that she acted up to her lights. She couldn't get outside her own nature. If one were absolutely just, that would count for something in one's summing up. I don't say it would with me. I'd much rather put on the black cap and condemn her finally—but at least, if she touched my life again, I should like to think myself capable of taking the humaner view."

"You would take it," he asserted with conviction. He could believe it of her very well, for this one shock had not shattered his faith in the moral and spiritual superiority of woman as woman. For himself, being a man, he did not stop to dissect his feelings or lay down any rules to meet a purely hypothetical case. He knew when he allowed himself to dwell at all upon that night in the open boat that the passion of shame and grief, horror and immeasurable contempt, that had shaken him then had diminished very little of its force. His hardly-won self-control had barely sufficed to hold him back from making an open display of it. It was conceivable that if she crossed his path again, and especially if she intermeddled with that which he held in trust, his power of self-repression might fail him. For though we boast of our progress towards the higher slopes of civilization, there is none so far upon the road that he is safe beyond the possibility of reverting to savagery.

"And now," she said, with a reversion to her usual briskness, "I'm going to give you a cup of tea out of my beloved Drew basket, and here is Mrs. Dewar come to make it. She considers it a sacred British duty to shake my little silver pot in the face of all France, to prove how misguided it is in imagining it can make tea."

"You know, my dear," protested Mrs. Dewar, when she had duly been introduced, "you said yourself yesterday the tea the waiter brought up was too weak to come out of the pot!"

"Dear me! Did I say anything so brilliantly original as that? Come and sit here," she punched the cushions, "on the sofa. I've lit the stove, and you can have five comfortable minutes to talk to Mr. Darnaway in before you need think of it. Make the most of them, for you know we're going away to-morrow."

"So soon?" he said, forgetting to devote himself to the placid little old lady with the inalienable youthfulness of look.

She nodded.

"We are due at Garmisch to meet some of our hundred and one dearest friends. When we have ceased to be overawed by the Zugspitz, we may drive to Innsbruck, or we may go to Ober Ammergau."

"Our rooms are taken," Mrs. Dewar helped the explanation, "and it would be so extravagant to pay for them and not occupy them."

"See how I am kept in order! Granny has decreed that we shall haunt the boarding-house in future, as a protest against the shameless rapacity of hotel-keepers."

"Three waiters to bring one cup of coffee and one piece of toast," said the old lady, laying one long finger over one little finger, "and each of them expects a tip!"

"And a boarding-house will certainly be cheap considering the amount of human nature that will be thrown in gratis! But you'll have to be careful of the quality of your humour in the Fatherland, Granny; jokes are not made in Germany any more

than they are manufactured in Scotland," she looked at him mischievously.

"They are a native product," he retorted, "too valuable for export. We keep them all for home consumption!"

They talked light nothings for a time while the old lady administered cups of tea which she declared was brewed to perfection. Darnaway burned his fingers over the spoons, which were in some mysterious way attached to the spirit-lamp; there was some little trouble in extracting the cups and plates, which were packed as ingeniously as if the basket was a Chinese puzzle. The cream, poured out of a glass bottle, and the cakes, handed in a tin with an enamel lining, gave the meal a little the air of a gay and festive picnic. Darnaway found it a pleasant break in the day's sightseeing, for he was a much more conscientious tourist than young Tosh, who merely pecked at the fruits from the tree of knowledge offered by Baedeker.

He liked Mary Skelton's way with the little old lady; it reminded him of her way with Lilla Shore, protecting, kind, and gay. He liked also the new way in which she did her hair and the fashion of her dress, in brown, of some rich yet soft stuff, with a lace vest. She had a fine figure, and she looked best when she was rather splendid. He wondered vaguely if he didn't like her a good deal more than he knew.

"Don't trouble to put the things back," she said, as he took her empty cup. "The chambermaid must wash them. Granny insists that she shall earn her

*douceur* by the labour of her hands as well as the wiles of her tongue. When we get to the boarding-house we shall wash them ourselves. When shall we be in Munich? Oh, I don't know, but you will see us before very long. And about Tosh," she said, as he rose to take his leave—"oh, by the by, he may come to-morrow if he is punctual, but we start at seven—about Tosh. I wouldn't worry. There's the girl, you know."

"The girl?" he asked, bewildered.

"The ward," she smiled sardonically. "In spite of the minister, and the *einjähriger*, there is still room for the magnificent Tosh. Think how kind it is of me to provide you with such an easy way of escape from your guardianship. Take Tosh to Munich. Miss Hēla will do all the rest!"

He did think of it more than once on his circuitous road home, for he took a picture gallery on the way, and the more he thought of it the more he found fitness in the idea. Age, suitability, propinquity—what a beautiful concatenation of circumstances!

"It takes a woman to perceive these combinations," he said to himself, but he did not despise Miss Skelton's penetration. The boy and the girl? What more natural! Hēla was pretty; she was probably also very willing that this fact should be acknowledged. On the other hand, Tosh the susceptible had an inexhaustible mine of admiration ready to squander. Between the canvases on the wall he saw an unpainted picture in which Young Love, crowned, bowled (contrary to tradition) in his chariot on a

smooth highway towards matrimony, and he found it on the whole more interesting than the constellation of Old Masters he had paid his franc (and a second franc for the catalogue) to see.

Disjointed fragments of the inward monologue he was holding intruded between the time-honoured masterpieces.

What a singular number of bibulous old persons with red noses Rembrandt must have known ! ”

“ If Hēla is at all like what I imagine her to be, I shall be able to look Tosh’s mother in the face if anything serious comes of it.”

“ ‘ *Fighting lions after Rubens.* ’ How badly the catalogue is printed ! Rubens has concealed himself successfully. No doubt he’s up that tree.”

“ Tosh doesn’t want money with a wife. Besides—she’ll have a little some day.”

“ ‘ *Portrait of Rubens by Himself.* ’ Got down from his tree, and doesn’t look much the worse for his scare. What a pull dress gave a man in those days ! Almost any chap would look well in that brave show.”

“ I wonder how soon I can get him to leave Paris ? ”

It took the best part of three weeks, but at the end of that time they were established in the *Zum Grossen Monarchen*, honoured with a star in Baedeker’s Bavarian section. Tosh wanted to know who the dickens the Gross Monarch was, and Darnaway with bated breath suggested that it might be the Prince Regent. He at least was the personage whose blue carriage with the silver coachman was the signal for all hats to fly, and all bodies to bend like corn



sheaves before a wind. You found that little fact out almost before you had quitted the station.

The *Zum Grossen Monarchen* had at least the merit of lifting its comfortable, red-tiled head in the older part of Munich, the only part of it architecturally worth a second look, and it seemed to Darn-away as he hunted frantically in his portmanteau for his soap that the cathedral bell with its deep and soft and mellow music was worth the extra mark or two in the bill which, for the privilege of English birth, he resigned himself to pay.

"I shall take Tosh out to-morrow," he said, flinging on the floor slippers and combs, guide-books and shirts, in his wild search. For it is one of the rules invented for the confusion of travellers that you shall find no soap in the washstand dish.

"The English," says that deep philosopher, Mark Twain, "carry their own with them. Other nations do not need it."

"There it is at last," he said, making a grab at the recalcitrant cake of Pears'. "Yes, I'll march him straight off to-morrow to Löwenzorn.

## CHAPTER XII

### WOOD NYMPHS

TOSH, however, frustrated this design by his too impulsive haste to get down to breakfast next morning.

The stairs of the Gross Monarch were dark, they were of wood, they were slippery with the tread of many feet through many years going up and down them ; and Tosh, taking them at a rush, only saved himself from a bad fall at the cost of a severe wrench to his right ankle.

He made light of it, limping into the coffee-room with a wry face. It was nothing. Why didn't they light their confounded stairs better? Did they expect a man to have the eyes of a cat for the dark? "Here, waiter—garçon—what do they call the head boss in German? Oh, Kellner. Some coffee and ham and eggs. By crips! It's the land of pigs, and they don't know ham and eggs!"

Darnaway made up his mind that there wasn't much amiss, and that the expedition planned for the afternoon might still come off. But in spite of a magnificent breakfast and a very commendable effort to rise as if nothing were amiss, Tosh was obliged to

sink back into his seat again with an exclamation of pain.

"I'm floored," he said; "the beastly thing is swelling. I'm afraid you'll have to go alone, old man."

"I can't leave you like this. Sit still, don't try to move. Kellner!"

"Gomming!" replied that august personage, with the usual contempt of a native for the Englishman's linguistic attempts. None so systematic in his snubs as the German waiter.

Together they got Tosh into an inner room and deposited him on one of those unreposeful velvet sofas with which insular limbs become so early acquainted on "the continent." A bath you may go far to seek, but a red velvet sofa will thrust itself upon your notice in the most modest of lodgings.

Tosh's boot removed and his sock cut off, the waiter suggested an embrocation with an unpronounceable name, and Darnaway a doctor. Tosh scouted both pieces of advice. He knew all about it. Did Darnaway suppose he had never come a cropper when he was helping at a muster?

"I guess I'm not going to give in my ticket this trip!" he remarked. Rest and a cold-water rag would do the business. He insisted on Darnaway catching the train they had fixed on the night before.

"But it isn't till after tiffin. We'll see how you are then."

As he appeared to be no worse, Darnaway finally yielded.

"Just shove the sofa up to the window, will you?" Tosh commanded; "it will be fun to watch those German Johnnies." He had already made an observation which filled him with scathing contempt.

"I say! They take off their hats to each other!" he cried.

"Have you never heard the dark saying:

"'May your soul have no more rest than the hat of a German'?"

Darnaway made time at the station to buy all the comic English prints he could lay hold of, and sent them back by a *Dienstmann* for the invalid's amusement. For himself, since he had written to Frau v. Glümer, Hēla's grandmother, to ask permission to call, he supposed he had better go. It was a nuisance about Tosh. On the other hand, he would be able to gauge for himself what manner of girl Hēla was, and whether she would be likely to fall in with his designs for her own and Tosh's present amusement.

Frau v. Glümer, the widow of a general officer, was a lady of large means who lived in a flat in Munich in winter, and passed the summer at the family estate of Löwenzorn. He found no difficulty in getting directed to this place, for the family was as a household word in the Bavarian capital. As long, indeed, as there had been a Bavaria there had been a v. Glümer at Löwenzorn. The house had given its sons to the army, and its daughters to neighbouring potentates; indeed, the only daughter who, for centuries, had done that which was not expected of her, was Hēla's mother, who had

outraged all tradition by insisting on marrying a foreign nobody. That Hēla had won her way back to the family bosom was a testimony, surely, to the girl's own tact and charm, as well as to the grandmother's sense of justice. She was, Darnaway knew, only one of many grandchildren who surrounded Frau v. Glümer in her country home, but she had gone to stay for a fortnight and she had stayed three months.

The train, shaking off the rather mean and entirely uninteresting fringe of suburbs, soon entered a pleasant reach of flat green country, intersected by blocks of splendidly-kept forest ; but it was not till he quitted it after a ten miles' run and found himself plunging down a woodland track under an overshadowing canopy of green that he realised the true and inward romanticism of the situation.

Between the interlacing branches, each little twig and twiglet made manifest against a heaven of blue and gold, he saw an opposite slope, where the great trees also spread out benevolent arms of verdure ; but, in the valley beneath, what was that that went by with a flash of silver and a splendid, liquid music ?

"The Isar," he said to himself. "It used to 'roll rapidly' when I was a boy !"

And when he got to the bank, and the ferryman, leaving his spade in the patch he was digging, came down with clay-laden boots behind him to the crazy little landing-stage, he found that it had lost none of its brave haste since it ran red with the blood of Hohenlinden. But not red now ; not even silver,

seen at hand ; but a clear, pale, translucent green, as of liquid light, flowing between golden sands : a river of crystal, such as the saint saw in the Apocalyptic vision of the Celestial City.

He was sorry when the pennyworth of a voyage was over and he was borne upon those undulating billows to the further shore ; but even when he had climbed from the hollow to the summit crowned with the decaying towers of an historical Schloss, he was yet a long way from Löwenzorn. At an inn, which was the huntsman's home when the Castle provided dukes (themselves almost as savage as their prey) to slay the wild boar, he purchased further information at the price of a tankard of *Münchener*.

"Löwenzorn ? Certainly. Everyone knew the high-well-born family of v. Glümer. The noble house of their notabilities was distant *eine stünde*. The Herr stranger would take the first turn to the right after passing the church," and so on.

A *stünde* is an elastic term in the mouth of a native, but considering the general shortness of German legs and the stoutness of the German body with its consequent limit of breath, it may be reckoned at three English miles. Something was said about a carriage, but Darnaway preferred to walk.

He found a great charm in the flat, open country. The day was gay with sun, but tempered with a pleasant air. The road ran in part through crown lands, walled with distant mountains ; but it was broad, white and sandy, and not a tree fell out of line to throw its umbrella of shadow over the wayfarer. A German

"drive" is like unto the conscience of an upright man: it deviates neither to the right nor to the left in pursuing its steady course.

The one he trod finally brought Darnaway to the confines of the royal domain, and into the territory of the v. Glümers. Here, for a little space, was broken ground with scattered trees, under which the deer were feeding; the woodman's axe had been busy, but already Nature had flung her kindly drapery of briar and fern over many a wounded stump. Beyond, against the near horizon, firs and spruces closed up in compact black ranks, and upon the little summer breeze was borne the delicious breath they exhaled.

Like monks in some solemn funeral march they seemed to advance until they embraced and held him in their midst, and the whisper of the wind in their branches was the voice of their chanting.

Presently, from somewhere in the heart of the long array, there burst upon his astonished sight a little procession of maidens—or was it wood nymphs?—who came pirouetting and swaying down the green alley, entirely absorbed in their own delightful motion. She who led the way was a tall, slim girl, who held up her fluttering skirts and gyrated with a peculiar grace and verve. The row of children behind her, ranging from thirteen or thereabouts in diminishing steps and stairs ending in a puff ball of four, whose fat legs barely kept her from stumbling, were bent on imitating her airy undulations, and succeeded, at least, in dancing their socks over their thick ankles into their thicker-



soled shoes, and the blushes into their fat young cheeks as, with pigtailed bobbing, and faces creased with laughter, they followed in her wake.

The leader of this impromptu ballet was almost upon him, advancing as he did with his back to the sun, before the dazzle of filtering light in her eyes allowed her to perceive him. She arrested herself with a startled expression, the colour rippling over her face as the wind ripples over corn.

He knew her in a moment: those grey eyes with their fearless, innocent look, that wilful chin with the dimple, that adorable short upper lip that would scarcely shut over the white teeth—the photograph had prepared him for these, and yet it had left so much untold. For he had come in a dutiful spirit of resignation to the *Zeitgeist*, prepared to find in her all the modern developments of young womanhood, and he knew her in a flash for what she was—merely simple, sweet and good, like the single rose which had survived the dance to bloom at her throat.

"It is Hēla," was what he said.

"Yes," she put up a hand to stop the fluttering at her heart; "and you—you must be my guardian."

"Your father's friend and yours, Hēla."

She extended her hand with a pretty gesture of welcome.

"If we had known you would come this way——."

"Don't tell me I haven't come the right way," he implored, "for I was hoping you had come to meet me."

She eyed him gravely, measuringly, then suddenly she laughed.

"There is a front way for visitors," she said; "this is the back way, and we thought you would come about three o'clock—in a carriage."

"Oh, I know!" he said. "And you would all have been ranged at the top of the staircase with ten clean washed faces and ten Sunday sashes and ten curtseys ready to drop demurely to the stranger; but I like this way much best. You see I am a kind of uncle to you all, so I have presented myself with the freedom of the back-door."

The children, who had pressed forward, stared at him round-eyed and wondering, with the inquisitiveness of squirrels; but with that freemasonry of theirs recognised him for a friend, their shyness a thing of a mere minute.

Then he kissed them all round, beginning with Ernestine of the big feet, and ending with fat Magda, and repeated with many mistakes and corrections the lesson they set him as to which yellow polls and light blue eyes belonged to v. Glümers, and which to Arnoldi's, and which to v. Reitzensteins.

"I shall call you the nine muses," he said, giving up the task in pretended despair. "Those learned ladies are always spoken of in a batch, and nobody pretends to remember their names."

"And what is your name?" they demanded.

"My name is John—Herr John, but I decline to have it pronounced 'Yon.' The muse who gives me a 'Y' will forfeit a chocolate."

"We can say that!" they exclaimed in chorus. "We speak English very good. Herr Djon! Herr Djon!"

"And what will you call Hēla?" questioned Ruth v. Reitzenstein.

"There is only one of Hēla," said Ernestine v. Glümer. "Grandmamma calls her St. Helena when she is proud."

"Is she proud?" he asked. "If she is proud with me I shall call her Diana."

"Why?" asked eight shrill voices in one breath.

"Because Diana was a haughty lady who thought all the woodlands belonged to her, and everything in them."

"They belong to grandmamma," said Luischen Arnoldi seriously. "We've got a great many deers."

"You shall see them when you come to Löwenzorn."

"I see a great many dears, now," he said, and they wondered why Hēla laughed.

"But you must see our white cat first; it belongs to us *zusammen*, and—and when it has ten little kitlings we shall each *eins bekommen*. *Aber, wie herrlich!*"

"Does that mean that you will each become a kitten?" he asked with gravity.

"Yes," said Luischen, whose conquest of English—she being seven—was as yet imperfect; "and if there are eleven, you will become one too."

"*Unberufen!*" he cried—they all applauded.

At a somewhat unsteady pace, but with great content, they moved onwards, three clinging to each of Darnaway's arms, two with a proprietary clutch upon his coat-tails, Magda in front with admiration in her small countenance, endeavouring to walk backwards

so as to glue her eyes upon him—a mode of progression that resulted in sudden collapses of her small person on the path. Whereupon all the children laughed, and most of them picked her up.

Hēla, whom he had not kissed, was up to his shoulder as she walked near him, tall and slim as a young willow.

“It is a long time since we have met,” he said, looking at her across the bunch of flaxen heads; “but though you are not accustomed to old gentlemen, and I’m not accustomed to young ladies, I think we shall get on.”

“I remember you,” she said. “It is rather like a dream, but it isn’t a dream: and you are just the same——”

“Not quite,” he said, yet with an odd pang of regret that it should be so, “for that is seventeen years ago, and you were no bigger than the ninth muse, and perhaps not so old, and certainly not so fat!”

Little pitchers drank in this remark greedily.

“Did you know Hēla when she was little?”—astonishment was depicted in nine pairs of eyes. “*Aber*, as little as us?”

“Littler,” he replied succinctly.

“How big?”

He had in the end, to appease clamour, to sit down on a fallen tree and tell them all about it. This took a long time, and the chronicler, under severe cross-examination, was perhaps compelled to invent a few facts. Such, at least, was Hēla’s opinion. Then public attention was diverted by the discovery that Kätchen’s

shoe button had sprung off, and it was vainly poked for with his stick among the carpet of needles. Mariechen next appealed to the company in general for its joint handkerchief, which, after a vain ransacking of pockets bulging with a miscellaneous collection, was finally discovered tied to the bow of Magda's sash. These things promoted intimacy in a wonderful way. So that they all finally arrived at Löwenzorn in a cluster, like bees at swarming time.

The ancient house stood so close beleaguered by the thick trees that it looked as if it had pushed its way through them to the front row, maintaining that hazardous position with a farmyard flung out on one side and a garden space at the other. The building presented to the spectator a strange mixture of ancestral dignity and present-day indifference. Once a monastery, now alive all summer-time with children's voices, it preserved in itself the best traditions of old German architecture, but threw its sovereignty away by its slovenly alliance with the mean and the modern.

Straight past the fine old oak door, without an inch of intervening pavement, ran the public highway, deep rutted with wheel-marks; the yard, so placed as to be frankly visible from the chief windows, was a litter of straw, carts, hand-barrows, farm implements—the sodden grass a playfield for innumerable ducks; a row of tumble-down outhouses leaned for support against the massive chateau walls. In odd contrast, the cow-houses, which one crossed a quagmire to reach, were ordered on the latest sanitary principles

the splendid herd of Jerseys and Alderneys sumptuously housed.

A perfect army of servants appeared to be about, but none intent upon his business. An old crone, toothless and begrimed, sat upon a bench at the door, mumbling food out of a bowl; three farm hands lounged beside her smoking. They grinned at the approaching children, but did not rise.

A young woman with rough, curly hair, a short petticoat and bedgown, who seemed to spring straight out of Darnaway's youngest Scotch memories, now came to the door, with an intention of ushering the stranger in, but the children would have none of her.

"*Nein*, Malchen, we will take the Herr to the grand-mamma ourselves!" they cried, and so closed about him, holding hands to make a chain, and led him, a willing captive, into the great, vaulted hall, in and out of which the swallows were darting, and where the pine-scented air, entering at one door and wandering out at another, made a delicious coolness.

Hēla followed behind, smiling.

## CHAPTER XIII

### AT LÖWENZORN

GRANDMAMMA, Ernestine v. Glümer the elder, spoke English very correctly, though with a tongue a little stiffened from disuse, for all her married life she had thought in German.

"I have English blood," she said, "but only a little. Enough, perhaps, not to hate your country so much as many Germans do."

"I'm afraid we are not loved," he said.

"What would you?" she asked. "You can't have everything. We don't love the hand that slaps us, though we may have to submit to be slapped. But we pay you the compliment of learning your language—even the children. My grandchildren learn it with their own."

"They speak it capitally," he said, which was true.

"They have an English Miss."

"Only she's Irish," said Hēla softly.

Darnaway listened, but his attention was in danger of wandering. It was engaged in an astonished contemplation of grandmamma, a short, lean figure between sixty and seventy, with the palest possible blue eyes. Their colourlessness gave them an odd



effect of staring. Her grey hair was worn in a tight knob with a wisp of rusty black lace about it ; a skirt of some nondescript hue and material, very much the worse for wear, and an ancient jacket of velveteen, once black, but now brown with age, completed her costume. On the thin, yellowish, not over-clean hand she had offered him, sparkled a very fine emerald.

As she had expected his visit, he did not imagine her to be at all discomposed, as Mrs. Andrew Darnaway, for instance, would have been discomposed had she been discovered by a stranger without the armour of her best black silk. Frau v. Glümer's pedigree was adornment enough, as he was afterwards to discover, for he never saw her dressed otherwise.

"What do you think of your ward?" she asked.

"She has grown a great girl," he replied, finding nothing better to say, conscious that Hēla hovered somewhere in the background with several of the little cousins, whose various small whisperings and rustlings he could hear behind his chair.

"She is the biggest of them all. Ten granddaughters I have round me here and one grandson. The others are grown too big to play."

Darnaway began to pity the solitary boy ; and then, remembering his nationality, diverted his pity to the girls. No doubt the young Bashaw expected them to wait on him.

"He is going to be a soldier," said Ernestine, ever ready with information, now coming forward, "like brother Fritz and cousin Paul. But he cried when a wasp stung him."

"He is only nine," said Hēla gently.

"I, too, am nine only," protested Ruth, "*änd*, I do not cry."

"He says a wound is quite different," Lina defended the absent, "for if it does bleed very much the Kaiser gives you a medal. And people say: 'Here is a hero'; but it is girls only that pretend to be *tapfer* for a little thing like a wasp sting."

"Ah," said grandmamma grimly, "his mother was a Lerbach, and the blood in *their* veins is ink."

"Where is this hero?" asked Darnaway.

"He's in the kitchen garden eating *Stachelbeeren*," replied several voices in chorus, and one added as a solo: "last time he had a pain in his lap, but last time isn't this time, he says. And do you think that is right?"

"So he's philosopher as well as hero!"

"What's a philosopher?" questioned Lina, but Ruth was quicker than she. "I asked first," she said, and precedence was granted her.

"What colour is your blood? The mamma says ours is blue colour, but when you prick your finger with a needle, it is only common red."

"I'm afraid mine is only common red all the time, but then, I'm not a soldier. I'm only a shepherd."

"Have you many sheep?"

"More than I have ever tried to count."

Grandmamma's pale, inscrutable eyes rested on him. "I'm glad you sent her back," she said abruptly, and he knew that her thoughts had gone with that long lost daughter across the seas.

"She has been a long time in reaching Germany, but you have a proverb which says: 'Late is better than never.' I find it true."

Hēla came forward and laid a hand softly on the old velveteen jacket.

"I never meant it to be never, grandmamma," she smiled. "And you didn't ask me—I just came."

"You ran away," said Darnaway. "That's the story as I have heard it."

She looked at him with laughter in her fearless eyes.

"Perhaps that was the beginning," she said.

"And now I'm commissioned to carry you back again."

"Perhaps that isn't the end," she demurred.

"Who talks of ends?" said grandmamma. "We are only in the middle yet. You would like to see my old house?" she addressed her guest. "You will see it many times, I hope, but the first time is everything. So we must go while it is light."

He assented eagerly, and while she led the way she continued talking. "You must leave Munich, you and that young man who has hurt his foot. He will never get well there, it is too hot. Only English people go to Munich in the summer. You must come out here; not here in Löwenzorn, because we have no room with the nurses and the governesses and the children; but over there—" she gave an indefinite wave of her arm. "At Schloss Schwarzenwald they let rooms. It is no longer the old family, you may believe me, but a *rotourier* from the City,

who has made money, and will make more out of his Castle. But you need not pay much ; half of what they ask will be enough. What do you pay, now, at the Great Monarch ? ”

He told her they had just arrived, and he did not know.

“ You made no bargain ? ” she looked at him disapprovingly, “ and when they treat you as a foolish person, you go away and say you have been swindled. *Nun*, when you come to Schwarzenwald I will make the arrangement. Ach, I know. A cold bath for each of you, and ham and egg and toast for breakfast. But the toast you will not get. This is the Ritter Saal.”

He found himself entering an immense room, its many windows emblazoned with coats of arms, in the fine old colouring which is a lost art ; antlers and the heads of ferocious grinning boars grouped upon the walls, with spears and other weapons of the chase, making an arabesque about them. Except for a row of chairs, carved in old German designs, set against the walls, and some children’s toys scattered in a corner, the vast room was entirely empty.

“ We dance here on wet days,” said Hēla, tapping the floor with a light foot.

Here, too, the swallows, those chartered libertines, were allowed to build, skimming in and out of an open lattice. Beyond the great arched doorway which faced him Darnaway saw a bare vista of corridor with doors open on either side and a window at the end red with sunset. Old wardrobes of carved

oak placed along the passage seemed bursting with clothes ; an overflowing crib had wandered out of the nursery from which there now issued sounds of splashing. An imp, escaping the ordeal of the bath, ran out half nude across the crimson stain, her white, naked feet seeming to bathe in it. Hēla with a laugh gave chase, Ernestine and Augusta pounding after her. It was all very homely and pleasant.

The living-room to which they passed on moved him to a new wonder. It bristled with reminiscences of the day when every v. Glümer was a sportsman by instinct. Antlers everywhere, a forest of them. They provided an uneasy back for each chair in the room ; they fringed the old-fashioned sideboard and curiously interlaced the high mantel mirror ; almost one looked to see them sprouting from the ancient spinet showing a row of yellow teeth against the wall.

The children's soft, dimpled flesh, Hēla's round, young curves, seemed almost to suffer crucifixion against those cruel spikes. Yet they nestled comfortably enough. Hēla, lying back, found a resting-place for her head between the tines ; they made a fantastic crown for her brown hair. He noticed how full and firm and white her round throat was, rising out of the low-cut German frock of dark blue stuff.

Only grandmamma sat stiffly upright, discouraging lounging.

The table was spread for an expected daughter and son-in-law, and she hospitably pressed him to eat. The linen was spotless and of fine quality, but the

knives, forks and plates were scattered as if they had fallen from heaven. A home-cured ham was placed at one end, a cheese at the other. Frau v. Glümer went out and gave an order, and presently the same untidy servant he had seen before came in with a great plate of rolls and a tankard of ale. A second *Mädchen* followed with milk and butter. The children clustered at the further end of the long table, each with a mug reclaimed from the sideboard, and watched grave-eyed while Hēla poured out the frothing new milk.

Frau v. Glümer drew the bread-platter towards her and began, in a business-like way, to split and butter, on an outstretched palm, the crisp *brödchen*. She gave Darnaway his choice of ham or cheese and handed him his portion on the point of a knife. Each child received a roll with a great wedge of cheese speared in a similar fashion.

"They have had their supper," she explained, "but children can always eat. Help yourself again to beer. We brew it ourselves. It is good."

Drawn fresh from the underground cellar where the monks doubtless kept their supplies, it was deliciously fresh and sparkling. He ate and drank, finding something humorous and delightful in this merry party.

When he came to go at last, he found that even his outset had been arranged for.

"You shall go in the carriage that is to fetch my daughter from the station," she said, and he found no chance of remonstrance,



The carriage was as queer as everything else in this mediæval home: bright yellow, very long in the body, with a hooded seat in front and an open one behind. It required agile legs to reach that hooded seat. A pair of powerful black horses with long sweeping tails were harnessed to this queer vehicle, a cross between a Bavarian *Post Wagen* and a country stage-coach of bygone days. The youth who proposed to drive climbed to his high perch wearing his farm clothes, and took the reins in bare, dirty hands. His green Tyrolese hat with its little tuft of feathers was stuck well back upon his head.

A last surprise awaited Darnaway and sent the blood to his bronzed cheek. As he was making his final goodbyes to the reluctant children, Frau v. Glümer, exploring the folds of her skirt, produced a purse. She passed a coin from it to the expectant hand of the driver.

"Now," she turned to Darnaway, fixing him with those pale eyes, "I have given fifty pfennig to the driver as a *trinkgeld*, and you, you give him nothing at all. He will not wish it, but 'thank you' you may say to him."

"Shall I tell you how to say it in German?" whispered Hēla, her face alight with mischief, "or perhaps he might not understand."

That laughing face took the sting from the affront, and restored his self-respect.

It was all a part of the play. He was a boy again delighted to have his tips provided for him. The pig-tailed Augusta and Ernestine were shouting to this



new playmate from the Ritter Saal window : " Come back ! come back ! "

Then with a plunge the horses started and the great forest closed about him. The steamy mists were rising on stealthy wing as they crossed the open ground, and the deer at rest were scarce distinguishable from the tree stumps cut close ; but the scene he had left behind remained vivid on his mental canvas.

Yet the one thing he said to himself insistently was this :

" Tosh is too young."

## CHAPTER XIV

### HELENA OF TROY

TOSH, like most of his fellow-sufferers, found that a sprained ankle is not a thing that will heal for the wishing. It declines to be made light of or ignored. He had to take account of it, and in the three days of enforced inactivity he had impressed all the features of the Marien Platz sufficiently on his mind, or so he said, to last him a lifetime.

He was sacrilegious enough to remark that he didn't think much of that last stronghold of the mediæval city. It was, in his view, rather a poor show; you could pay to see it better staged in any provincial theatre.

There was a distorted truth in this perhaps, and certainly the German figure is not well suited to move against a background of romance. The bustle of people coming and going in and out of the little shops or disappearing into blackness under the archway beneath the shining roof of the old Rathhaüs; the little cabbies sitting inside their *einspänner* like spiders waiting for flies; the tramcars sliding up and down with a tinkle of electric bells, were all very commonplace features of a very commonplace day,

and Tosh refused to see with eyes that can perceive the mystic pathos of a past, gone and vanished spiritually, yet lingering corporeally still in the bustling present.

He found nothing to approve either in the *Maria Saïlle*, a slender shaft uplifted skywards, and holding poised on its apex high above the street's turmoil and traffic the benign figure of the Madonna ; nor in the fresh wreath of flowers which piety laid at her feet so early in each day's beginning that Darnaway—no sluggard himself—whose bedroom looked on the Square, was never able to detect the giver.

"And if they do play any tricks, as Baedeker says, with that Butcher's Fountain, I wish they would start off now. What's the use of it, anyway? It doesn't hold any water, and if it did they wouldn't know what to do with it."

"It isn't intended for washing purposes; it's a drinking fountain."

"Well, I'm not gone on them as a nation, but I wouldn't play it so low down as to accuse them of drinking *water*!"

The one thing that stirred him to unholy laughter was the daily changing of the guard at the new Rathhaüs. By craning his neck at a particular angle he could take part in this ceremony. It came off at midday, and the mingled solemnity and comicality of the proceeding never failed to set him shouting.

Darnaway, indeed, was so afraid of the waiter's inculcating eye that he was obliged to remind Tosh

that he might haply find enforced solitude less of a jest.

"Under the roof of the 'Great Monarch' to laugh at his Prince Regently Highness' soldiers is a clear case of *lèse-majesté*, Tosh. I would advise you to moderate your mirth."

"Lord!" cried Tosh, "it's worth crossing the world to see them stamp and mince and strut as if the whole of creation had its eye on them. I wouldn't miss it for any money!"

But on the fourth day even this spectacle began to pall, and he was glad enough to lend an ear to Darnaway's suggestion of a move to Schwarzenwald.

"Anything would be better than to be mewed up here," he said. "The place smells two hundred years old."

"The Castle, I'm afraid, has the gathered odour of two thousand."

"Well, I don't mind a good, open, out-of-doors smell," said Tosh, "even if it should come from dead and gone Romans; it's the ghosts of their dinners my stomach turns at. You get them hanging around here all day, and you can't eat your own when it comes."

It was finally arranged that Darnaway should go and consult Frau v. Glümer and invoke her promised help. He went immediately after breakfast, so that there should be no room for any change of Tosh's mind. His own turned with less and less reluctance to the thought of a migration to the country. June had taken hold of the streets like fire, and the woods

by the green Isar lured him to their cool deeps. Besides, the run to the city was a mere affair of half an hour, and a conscientious tourist could still devote days to the admonitions of Baedeker.

The account Frau v. Glümer gave him of Schwarzenwald still further stimulated his desire. The Castle, which had gone through pretty well all that a castle of so venerable an age can accomplish in the way of adventure, was now the property of a Munich merchant, who had patched together the one habitable wing and was glad to let off such rooms as he did not himself use in the summer time.

"A countrywoman of yours has been there some weeks," said Frau v. Glümer, who knew everything that took place within a radius of ten miles, "but she keeps to herself, they tell me; no doubt because she speaks no German. But there is room enough and to spare for her and you and the ghosts."

"Or the rats," said Darnaway. "That's what most modern ghosts resolve themselves into."

"Oh, you mustn't trample on our best traditions in that way!" said Hēla gravely; "the headless lady of Schwarzenwald who walks the ramparts on moonless nights dressed in white is an article of faith with us."

"Very well; I will not suggest that she is only an article of washing left out by mistake. But it must be very inconvenient to walk about without your head. For what particular folly do you suppose she lost it?"

"I think," she said, showing one small dimple, "it was a punishment for having already lost her heart."

They were in the garden, and grandmamma presently left them there together. The children's "Miss" had ten minutes earlier come out, and inexorably, despite many desperate expedients on their part for delay, swept before her all the flaxen pigtails.

"You know the Herr Pfarrer has come," she said severely. "Isn't it Saturday?"

Yes, it was Saturday, day of joy and delight, tempered by the thought of the Pfarrer at one end and the weekly head-washing at the other.

Adalbert the valiant was alone respited. He was suffering from a mysterious ailment which usually attacked him towards the end of the week, and which could only be alleviated by seclusion in his own room. Adalbert, indeed, scored on both points, which would have been unfair had he not been one of the superior sex, for he had no pigtail to be tortured with soapy knuckles.

The garden was as neglected as the yard. The weeds of years invaded the damp walks; flowers straggled and bushes grew unpruned. Yet at a turn one came upon a carefully trained *Laube* where not a twig was out of place in this woven defence against the sunlight. The coffee table was spread under this green gloom.

Perfect order also prevailed in the kitchen garden, where the vegetables were drilled as if by a Prussian sergeant. It was but another illustration of the sane,

eminently practical, but limited trend of the national character. Take care of the useful, but let the merely ornamental take care of itself.

There were some fine roses abloom here against a sheltered wall, the fancy of a daughter of the house who was indulged in making experiments in one long, sunny border. Hēla pointed them out with pride, and he admired, but said, with a full realisation of her own sweet flowering :

"I think it such a pity single roses have gone out of cultivation."

She laughed.

"Tante Rachel says you should get as much as you can for your money. And so we cultivate the double rose."

"And you?"

"Oh, I? Roses cost nothing here, and I love them all."

"Hēla," he said, of a sudden grave, "tell me one thing, and mind you tell me true. Honour bright, you know! Were you happy with Tante Rachel?"

Her face was like an open book in which he could read at will. She looked a little puzzled, a little uncertain.

"Happy? That means so many things, doesn't it, even to oneself, and a different thing to different people? Yes, I was happy. I didn't miss anything. I didn't want anything—*much*. Dear Tante Rachel gave me"—her smile broadened a little—"everything that was good for me."

"Ah," he said grimly, "we know what that means!"



"It wasn't her fault that good things aren't always the nicest."

"Well, if I were a properly constituted guardian, I suppose I should insist on carrying on your education on the lines your Aunt Rachel has laid down. I ought to drive you forth before me, as Miss Hunt drove the Muses, to learn your catechism. I'm told you haven't sufficiently appreciated your privilege as a Scotchwoman to know that valuable document by heart."

"You have been told so many agreeable things about me!" she said with spirit. "As for the Shorter Catechism, how much of it can *you* repeat?" She turned the tables on him. "Say Question 12, now, with the proofs. No shirking! The proofs!"

"That is a reversal of our positions to which I cannot submit."

"And *that* is a way of getting out of it!" she retorted, her lip curled up like a leaf and all her pretty little teeth showing.

"I'm afraid Tante Rachel's repressive treatment hasn't been very effective."

"Being twenty, don't you think I might be trusted to take charge of my own morals? As for your guardianship, I consider that it began when I was two years and eleven months and fourteen days old, and ended when I was three."

"You did your best to make it end before that! What a little rebel you were! It was all I could do to carry you on board. I believe I owe my premature baldness to the success with which you tore

my hair out by the roots on that occasion. I'll turn you over to Tosh. He's just at the stage of convalescence when he'll be delighted to have somebody to quarrel with."

"I am not a quarrelsome person!" she said with dignity, "so your Mr. Tosh will be disappointed, and it won't be any punishment to me because I *like* boys."

"Oh, Hēla," piped the voice of Luischen in shocked reproof, "and you know that cousin Friedhelm, when he came here to visit the grandmamma, had to go away again because you wouldn't love him! He told us so himself. And cousin Fritz——"

Hēla's cheeks rivalled the damask rose on the wall.

"Luischen," said Darnaway severely, "do you know what happens to truants?"

"*Was ist denn, ein*—truant?" asked Luischen to gain time, rolling her r's in her funny little way, but with suspicion in her eye.

"A little girl who shirks learning her Sunday verse."

"*Aber*, I didn't, Herr John!" protested the aggrieved damsel; "the Pfarrer said I said mine the best of all, *und* he gave me a peppermint. And Miss said, 'In the garden you may go out.'"

"In that case I apologise. Perhaps the ends of justice would be met if *I* were to give you a chocolate."

"Three!" demanded Luischen, seizing her chance to make terms.

"Very well, Miss Greedy. If you had been

content with *one* I should have given it you. Since you insist on three you must capture them for yourself." Whereupon he set off at a terrible pace—surely long legs never walked so fast before—in and out and round about the beds, wheeling and doubling; Luischen—all black legs and a shrill voice—pursuing him vainly.

"So there have been others in the field before Tosh," he thought to himself as he walked home towards the ferry. And who could wonder? Even Rachel, in far off Edinburgh, had heard the clank of sword and the click of spurs, and had dreaded that her child should be taken from her. She need not have feared, seemingly. He smiled as he thought of that easily damaged German susceptibility that had made young cousin Friedhelm proclaim his wound to all the pricked-up ears in the old garden at Löwenzorn. The *naïveté* of a German courtship is indeed a thing to waken astonishment in an Englishman; it is so demonstrative in its prosperity, so unreserved in its proclamation of defeat. 'And Fritz.' There had been a Fritz as well, and who knows, a Johann, or a Karl or a Wilhelm, too? This Helen, like that other of Troy, was made for love.

He thought of her as he had left her at the great oak door, with all the band of released prisoners about her. She was so tall, she rose above them like a slim lady-birch among the bracken, and yet so young in her untouched simplicity and sweetness that she was only a larger child after all.

It was that quality in her—a something bravely open and fearless, because so wholly guileless, that appealed to him most strongly. It was written on her broad brow, it looked out of her laughing grey eyes, it sat on her charming mouth with its soft and tender curves. Strictly speaking, perhaps, there might be something to censure in her beauty—a nose too short, an oval not quite perfect in the line of cheek and chin; but who went to look for these defects saw but her bubbling, happy youth, her unstudied gaiety, the pulse of life so warm within her.

And it is because we so quickly forget that we, too, once possessed—however early we may have lost or squandered it—this magic gift to see only what is pure and exquisite in Nature and human nature, that we too often come in middle life to think that in taking account of the mean and the sordid we have summed up the whole tale of life.

Going home through the woods he overtook the Pfarrer, a man with a rugged, simple, good face, the manners and accent of a peasant, and the heart of a saint.

Their road lay together, for the Pfarrer's little church was perched above the Isar, close to the old Schloss; Darnaway had heard the quarters told musically from the small belfry and had seen the sheen of the iron crosses with which the graveyard was sown.

The Pfarrer's talk was of the little flock he had left behind; he spoke of them with a discrimination, an

almost minute analysis, pathetic in its way from the man doomed to a life of celibacy, and with, for all the love he could not hide, a curious, timid respect, as if these little snub-nosed persons were fashioned of a superior clay. He spoke diffidently of Hēla, too, of her beauty, her goodness to the little cousins.

"But," he said, with a very natural sigh of pity and regret, "the *gnädiges Fräulein* is Protestant."

"I, too, am a Protestant," said Darnaway with a smile, "but I hope that need be no bar to our friendship?"

## CHAPTER XV

### THE HAND OF FATE

**I**N that inner room, which opened from the coffee-room of the "Gross Monarch," and was private to Tosh except for the invading smells, company was being entertained.

The sound of voices came out to Darnaway before he opened the door, and the chink of spoon against cup, and when, after a minute given to wonder, he did open it, a lady in a white hat waved a little brown teapot at him by way of gay greeting.

"No," said Mary Skelton, "I'm not making a libation of the tea to celebrate our reunion! I'm only trying to get the water rather a better colour."

"I told the girl who waits on us, this morning, it wasn't tea at all," chimed in Mrs. Dewar, "but only *schmutziges Wasser*" (with evident pride in those two conquered words). "And she assured me quite seriously the water was perfectly clean."

"Fact is," said Tosh, "they don't know the look of water when they see it."

"When did you come?" asked Darnaway, slipping down into a seat beside Mary.

"Yesterday morning, but I discover it takes a little time to find your own particular niche in a boarding-house and to settle yourself in a graceful attitude when you climb up to it. I meant to tell you we were ready for you to call; but when I got Tosh's wailful little note I felt we must throw ceremony to the winds and fly to comfort him."

Darnaway looked across at Tosh.

From his red velvet throne that young potentate looked back at him with superiority.

"It was a chance shot," he said, "but it has gone home. And why should you be the only person to be entertained by ladies?"

Mary Skelton turned upon him with her most mischievous expression.

"Ah, so you've been seeing the ward!"

"Yes," he assented reluctantly. Was Hēla his ward? She had only that day repudiated his guardianship. "I went out there to see about rooms in an old Castle."

"What! the minute we come?"

"It was on Tosh's account," he hastened to say, and was very much obliged to Mrs. Dewar when she engaged the general ear.

"I think," she said, addressing each in turn with her bright eyes, "Mr. Tosh ought to see a doctor. He should have advice at once. If this injury is not attended to in time it will never heal."

"It certainly never will if I have a doctor!" cried the patient. "I know them. They keep you ill till they get the rent out of you, and then they think



they may as well throw in the water rate and the gas bill, and the children's schooling and the coals, and if you're not dead after that, they'll perhaps allow that you are better, so as to save you up for next year's bills."

Mrs. Dewar was not a lady of any imagination, and she was properly shocked.

"I should think, in a case of that kind, you would be justified in laying the matter before the Medical Council," she said. "My experience has been much more fortunate. I was obliged to have advice before leaving town. I had a stiff arm; I feel it still."

"We're both in the soup, then," said Tosh, meaning to be cheerfully sympathetic, and succeeding only in being bewildering.

"Soup?" she said faintly. "Oh, yes! I do believe in good home-made beef-tea for keeping up the system, but it was an embrocation that cured *me*. And in your case I should say ice-bags. That is the newest treatment for a sprain, I believe, and doctors are quite advanced in Germany, and they charge very little. Half a crown a visit, I believe. Now, my dear Mr. Tosh——"

"I want you to be good to her," said Darnaway, leaning over towards Mary and speaking confidentially. "She's a dear little girl, very pretty and very sweet and good, and I think you'll like her."

"Really?" she said sharply. "Since when did you perceive that the bread-and-butter miss is my ideal of womanhood?"

"I've known you to be very kind to girls, and helpless women."

She flushed a light red.

"And wasn't I good to her, wasn't I good to *you*, when I made that suggestion in Paris? Why haven't you taken my advice?"

"I am following it to the letter," he said, wishing he had not made his appeal, and wondering why he had made it except that he had an unformulated desire that everybody should compass Hēla with kindness. "That is why I thought of taking the boy out there. It is dull for him shut in here, or at least it was dull before you came."

"Ah," she said, "don't try to be complimentary. You haven't learnt the way yet. And I am certainly neither 'good' nor 'sweet' nor—'pretty'!" she added with a laugh.

"Please give me some tea," he said meekly. "If you hadn't extinguished me I might have surpassed myself this time, but you give my talents no chance."

"Practise them on the ward," she said; "she has had fewer compliments than I and she will not be so particular about the flavour. Now tell me about this Castle. I thought all the robber barons had turned merchants and were living in flats."

"So they have, and that's why we make free of their remains."

He began to tell her about the ruin, and she could see that it had touched his fancy, unfed so long by the time-worn and the hoary.

"I went to see it to-day with the Pfarrer," he said.

"The man has lived at Schwarzenwald ever since he had a cure—twenty years, or more—and he knows every inch of the place by heart. It's a kind of 'one love of a life' with him, a romance in stone, and really, in a measure, it deserves it. There is some very fine Roman brick-work in the towers and a bit of an old wall in the garden that antiquarians come a day's journey to see. But perhaps the best of all is the view from the tallest tower. It's splendid. You get the whole semi-circle of the Bavarian Alps spread out before you."

"That's all very well," she said, "but you can't sustain life on Roman bricks or a view. And no doubt it is damp and earwiggy. Centuries would not hallow an earwig in my eyes."

"It is absolutely dry. The rooms are on the second floor."

"Oh, very well. I see you are determined to shut your eyes to rheumatism and rats for the sake of romance" ("and to be near Löwenzorn," she said to herself), "but if you had waited for my advice——"

"I should have, if I'd known you were coming so soon."

"We didn't go to Ober Ammergau."

"I thought you had your tickets?"

"Yes. Granny will never cease to upbraid me for forfeiting them, but when it came to the time—I didn't want to use them."

"I'm glad," he said quietly.

"Why—do you disapprove of the Play?" she asked, astonished.

"I haven't considered the matter: I don't take it upon me to judge it, but—for myself, the story is good enough as it was first told."

She looked at him a moment wistfully, and then her eyes hardened.

"That wasn't my reason," she said. "The Penfolds were going, and so—I went the other way. *Voilà tout!*"

"Why do you always want to make yourself out worse than you are?" he said curiously. "You are too young to be a misanthrope."

"On the contrary, it is those 'bowed down by the immense responsibilities of youth' who are the true pessimists."

He shook a dissenting head.

"It's the part of the old and the disappointed, and you, at least, have no quarrel with life. And you are above being cynical for the cheap notoriety of the thing."

"Am I really expected to take that denunciation seriously?" she asked, "and do you expect me to give you an answer? You've benefited very little by my teaching if you do!"

"I don't know what you've tried to teach me," he said bluntly, "and so I'm afraid I've proved myself a blundering idiot of a pupil; but one thing you'll never succeed in making me unlearn."

"And that?" she said lightly, getting up and making a great show of buttoning a glove.

"My belief in you as——"

"No, don't! don't!" she said, putting up the

gloved hand and waving it lightly in protest. Her cheeks and her eyes were very bright and she was laughing, though rather mirthlessly. "I know you were going to say—'as a good woman.' There! I knew you were! And—I'd almost as soon you called me 'amiable.' 'A good woman!' It sounds like 'a comfortable cloak'—a thing compounded of dowdiness and utility."

He looked at her and was impelled to laugh too.

"That isn't what it means to me."

"Oh, no! I daresay there's some dim compliment involved, but, my friend, I will add another to my admonitions. (It is my turn now, you see). I have already said, 'don't try to flatter,' and now I will say, 'don't put even a foot on the pulpit stairs.' I like you so much better down among the unconverted audience with me!"

She did not give his unreadiness a chance for rejoinder, turning at once to her companion.

"Granny, you must tear yourself away from Tosh, or we shall not be in time for the evening scramble. You must come, both of you—" her glance included Darnaway—"and see us in our social Zoo."

"I'm a caged beast already," said Tosh dolefully.

"Oh, nonsense! You can come in a lordly *Zweispanner* and be carried up by the *Dienstmann* at the corner. We are really worth seeing—as a collection; otherwise we haven't a single interest in common except the tablecloth!"

Yet when they got outside, she seemed in no such haste.

"The air is pleasant now," she said. "We'll walk to the Cathedral and then take a cab. That room was very stuffy."

Side by side they paced for some yards without further remark. Then, following her own too transparent train of thought, Mrs. Dewar said insinuatingly :

"Don't you think Mr. Darnaway is a very agreeable man, my dear?"

"I think," said Mary, with such energy that her companion nearly jumped, "that he is an idiot!"

Mrs. Dewar felt as if something snapped inside her smart, bugled bonnet. Her thoughts whirled about without any order.

"I imagined," she faltered presently, "that he was clever."

"Don't you know, Granny—ah, you will know when you are as old as I am!—it is just the clever ones who are oftenest simpletons?" They had turned aside from the busy Kauffingerstrasse, and she suddenly paused before Jorris's shop. Jorris lives in the very shadow of the Cathedral and there ladies coming from prayer in the Virgin Church, and, moved anew to dedicate their handiwork to its service, step aside to order cope or vestment or stole or altar drapery: an act of piety wherewith to buy a quicker road to Heaven. Very gorgeous is the millinery of the priesthood you will see displayed there, aglitter with gold, every stitch put in to the sound of the bell's deep notes; but there is another window spread to be the snare of the tourist, the mere heretic whose

thoughts dwell only on table-centres and bed-spreads.

"What a comfort it would be if one could worship the curate!" said Mary, passing the first window by with an odd smile. It was at the second she drew up.

"There," she said, pointing rather vaguely, "I'm going to buy that thing, Granny, that yellow dragon curling its tail and wallowing in a green sea. It will just suit me; plenty of show and little labour. And—and—needlework is such *womanly* occupation, isn't it?"

The vision of a belated supper floated to the surface of Mrs. Dewar's chaos.

"If we are late——" she began. "You know you went hungry to bed last night."

"And for that reason we are not going home to-night. We are going to dine in the nearest good hotel. I am tired of your little economies, Granny: after that midday meal my self-respect wants restoration. I think—I almost think I am tired of Munich too."

\* \* \* \* \*

Yet a week later she was bicycling at Darnaway's side through the woods that overhang the Isar. The bicycle is no unknown or untried invention in Germany; indeed, it foreshadows itself as the instrument of emancipation for the German woman. In her bloomers, clothed yet unashamed, she will boldly override the law that as yet assigns her the lower place in creation, and lay flat the decree that makes of her the cook, the housemaid, the valet, the nurse



of her lord and master. On the wheel of Coventry she will scorch her way to freedom ; perhaps by the time she arrives she will have learned to adapt her costume to the generous breadth which Nature has bestowed on her.

Mary Skelton rode well and looked well (a more difficult matter) in an admirably cut skirt of grey ; her hat, her gloves, her shoes were grey also, and in their perfect simplicity—that simplicity which looks so cheap and costs so much—spoke of Paris.

The exercise gave her colour and animation.

“I was so glad to find one could hire,” she said, lifting her voice. The path was narrow and uneven, and he went in front as pioneer. “There is no wheel like one’s own wheel, still——”

“Yes ; take care,” he called back. “Those tree roots are the very mischief. I wonder if there isn’t a better path on the other side of the river ?” He looked behind him to where the great railway-bridge spans the Isar, and the blunt caps of the Cathedral towers lift themselves against the grey city haze, but it was too late to turn.

“It could not at least be more beautiful,” she said, and that was true, for now the path narrowed till it was a mere track set on the edge of the cliff with all the deep mystery of untrodden forest, sacred in its royal seclusion, on one side, and on the other, far beneath them, running between billows of foliage in every tender shade of green, the Isar, free as yet to flow in untamed splendour.

“When Tosh can get about a bit we must have

some spins. There's a great tract of undiscovered country ahead of us that would repay exploring."

"He likes your ruin?"

"Immensely. They sent all sorts of comforts—featherbeds, warranted to produce the finest kind of nightmare, and goodness knows what—over from Löwenzorn. The children are all coming out for tea on Friday. You and Mrs. Dewar must help us with them; but I'm afraid that will mean your coming by rail."

"Yes. Young as she is, granny isn't young enough for a bicycle."

The track wandered now, losing the river for a little, the trees and young undergrowth thick about it on either hand. There were birds singing in that green net, unafraid of the passing strangers, for in Bavaria the songster is sacred. The whispered talk in the tree-tops, that murmur that on the stillest day is never quite still, the incense of their breath, the lonely charm of the way, affected them both. They did not care to speak. Awhile they rode in silence, but when they wheeled again into the broader path which anew embraced the river, he slowed down and waited for her.

"Do you see that church spire over there?" he pointed across the valley. "That's the setting-place of the sun. It goes down there in a sort of tragic magnificence. I saw it last night, and when the woods had turned black that reach of river still ran like blood."

She looked for a little, then turned her face again in front of her.

"And those towers?"

"Our destination. If Tosh were fit he'd be up on the parapet yonder to hail you."

"I see the Bavarian colours. Are you treated like royalty?"

He laughed.

"That's to announce that there's a view of the mountains. It's a little device of the robber knight, turned landlord, to meet his rent and his rates. You put your penny in the slot and the panorama is turned on, when Nature is good-natured and helps to play the game."

"I'm glad she is good-natured to-day. You've found out a great deal already."

"There was nothing much to do after settling in yesterday except poke about and feed an inquiring mind. I fancy we shall find Tosh in the courtyard."

They had left the wood; and the village, with the church for central point, was now in front of them, a carpet of grain and hay and ploughed land running in stripes behind it. Immediately to the right the old Schloss dominated the landscape. Four towers it had once boasted, but three of these were in picturesque ruin, though the high roof still made a brilliant splash of red against the blue sky. The sloping banks and bottom of the moat were thick with daisies, and on the near side a row of wind-bent fruit trees leant over, as if in search of the long-vanished water; a week or two earlier their snows had drifted downward towards the daisies, but their season of brief rejuvenescence was over.

He helped her to alight at the drawbridge ; the great door with the faded and mouldy escutcheons in fresco over it was barred, but a little postern stood hospitably wide.

"Welcome to our royal domain !" said Tosh, hopping to meet them on an improvised crutch. "Mind that hole, or you'll fall into a yawning gulf and tack on another yard of tragedy ! If I had a cloak I would spread it at your royal highness's feet, but the sun is so beastly hot I left my overcoat upstairs."

"Oh, Tosh, you deceiver !" she cried. "You too, too lucky youth ! Is this what you call retiring from the world ?"

"It's pretty decent, isn't it ? I don't mind retiring so long as the world follows. Come over here. I made them bring out a chair for you ; did it by pantomime, you know ; and there's some iced claret."

She sank down in the low basket-chair, and, leaning back, looked up into the branches of the chestnut above her.

The chestnut was one of a double row, planted in the centre of the great courtyard, and each tapering cone to-day was a candelabrum of red and white, lit for June's coming. A blossom or two drifted down into her lap. Between the thick green she could see now a spear of blue sky, now a hand's breadth of red roof. When she turned her neck there was the great view tower high above both roof and tree, the flag hanging limp against the staff.

Darnaway, having wheeled the bicycles into safety,

came and sat on the edge of the well. A grey and lichen-grown Madonna, affecting in her worn and unregarded age, the joy of motherhood long faded out of her blurred face, the lines of her figure and the Child she clasped slipping back into the stone from which they were hewn, presided over it; on either side of her a little mound of church spoils—pinnacle, pillar, griffin, angel—shared a common ruin.

Darnaway drew up by a string the bottle of claret Tosh had submerged. "This or tea?" he asked her. "Have this first."

"You'll find it iced as I promised you," said Tosh. "That well goes right down through the rock. If you could let the bottle down far enough, it would touch the bed of the Isar."

"We take our history in slices," said Darnaway. "The well is the architectural speech of a rude, bold, warlike nation at the decadent point, when it was still a fighter, though no longer for conquest so much as to keep a clutch on the already conquered. The Madonna——"

"The Madonna," she took up the refrain, "belongs to an age that began to recognise the grace as well as the glory of life, its blossom as well as its root. Poor Mother Mary! She symbolises so much, and yet, no more than if she were the Diana or the Venus she came to dethrone, has she escaped time's brutalities."

"And the inner courtyard." Tosh glanced pointedly in front of him. "Please don't look behind you, Miss Skelton; I can't go in for the poetical lay, like you two, but it seems to me it represents nothing but the

bluntness of the Bavarian nose and the absence of a chap with a stock whip. I would give them a monumental licking if they left a litter like that at Maccoomba."

They both laughed; and Miss Skelton, having been forbidden, of course looked behind her.

"You're one of those ultra-conscientious people Tosh, who insist on showing up the wart when they paint your picture. I prefer the flatterer, Nature. She has set the chestnuts so that they just leave that graceful arch visible, allowing you to imagine it the vestibule to new pleasures. And that and nothing else, I avow, will I see!"

"That's right," said Darnaway; "a little short-sightedness is a very good thing on occasion."

("And a little short-scentedness," put in the incorrigible Tosh.)

"Life would be unendurable if you looked at it through a magnifying glass. When you're quite rested, do you think you could climb the tower stair? I want you to have a look at the view before the sun dips."

They lingered a long time up in that blue air, a little nearer to heaven than the common earth, where they seemed to be almost on a level with those distant peaks, rising point above point in a fretted curve of silver that spread itself from east to west. They gave five minutes to the key that hung by a nail from the parapet under a little pent-house to save it from the wet, but the summits were innumerable, and did not answer quite readily to their printed descriptions.



"And it seems—too intimate—to know their names," she said. "They are Royal Highnesses, and that is enough for me."

As yet the sun was high in the zenith, and left them cut clear as if with a knife against the blue; there was all the magic of its homegoing yet to come, when that stainless white would pass from glowing fire to regal purple.

"Let us wait and see," she said; "let us watch them put on their robes of state."

They stood for a long time in silence with heads mentally unbared before those distant majesties. Then his glance moved nearer home, taking in the river valley, the little villages dotted over the plain, the church with its onion-bulb spire, a toy church, set on a toy plateau of green, the fir-trees, like black cornstalks in their straight, serried ranks. He crossed the platform.

"We should see the courtyard from this side and be able to hail Tosh," he said, and paused with a sudden cutting of his breath that made him choke.

She lifted her arms from the sun-warmed wall and crossed to him.

"Can you really?" she was beginning, but he took her almost roughly by the arm.

"Look," he commanded. "Do you see Tosh, and do you see who is—with him?"

She bent over the ledge. Her eyes were keen too, and in that clear air everything was very distinct; the unfinished back of the poor Madonna, almost the pattern of the chintz covering the basket-chair she



had sat in, and in the open space between the double row of chestnuts—Tosh, an upset garden seat behind him. With one hand he grasped his stick, with the other he had bared his yellow head before a woman whose slender grace and ingratiating charm were subtly conveyed across the intervening distance.

Neither of them said anything.

When he spoke at last his voice was hard and cold.

"So that's the fellow-lodger! It's a cheap and shabby performance on the part of life. There was the whole world to send her to and—she is sent here!"

"I have always thought life a very second-rate novelist," she answered. "It can't invent a new plot; it soon comes to an end of its bag of tricks. The stupidity is ours to forget how often it uses the old, stale device of coincidence."

But she spoke to the empty air. He had forgotten her and was already creaking down the steep wooden stair.

## CHAPTER XVI

### UNDER THE CHESTNUTS

HE had taken but a few steps when he paused, and, remembering her, turned back again.

"I beg your pardon," he said quietly. "You said you would like to stay and see the sunset."

"No," she said. "I have changed my mind. It is time I was getting home. Mrs. Dewar will be anxious if I am late."

He helped her carefully down the first steep, ladder-like flight. There was no handrail, and in semi-darkness each step had to be felt for with caution. The strong, steady clasp of his hand gave her confidence. It also encouraged her to give him a little womanly counsel, though in her inward debate she was not sure whether she ought to speak or keep silence. But with an impulsive nature it is perhaps a foregone conclusion how such a debate will end.

She paused on one of the many landings that broke the long flight of stairs. These were dimly lit by loopholes in the thickness of the wall, each a window framing a little bit of the green world below.

"How pretty that is!" she said, "those black trees with the young wheat in the foreground."

Then she turned towards him, and her dark eyes were full of kindness and concern.

"Don't be troubled," she said; "even if he should imagine himself in love, the boy will come out of it all right."

"I am thinking of his mother," he said; "a very simple woman, and—good. She wouldn't understand how Tosh could care——"

"No, but she would not be able to do anything. If she were wise she would not try. It is an experience most boys go through if there is an old girl or a young matron handy—and willing—and it does them no harm. Indeed, it sometimes does them a great deal of good."

"If it had been you," he began naïvely, "if it had been some woman like you, I could have taken that hopeful view."

"I did my best," she said demurely, "in London——"

He looked at her sharply.

"You shouldn't say such things. You know you did nothing of the kind."

"Very well. Will it please you better if I change the tense? I would willingly (since you think me so safe) have offered myself up as—an ideal, if Tosh had been acquiescent, but now——"

"But now," he said, with a return to his deliberate common sense, "there is nothing to be done that wouldn't, in the doing, make things worse. She is about the last person I should either have expected or desired to meet here; but if, as I suppose, she is the other tenant of whom Fraŭ v. Glümer spoke,

she has a prior right to the place, and I have none to make her go."

"Perhaps she will leave of her own accord," she said faint-heartedly.

"It is very kind of you to suggest it," he said, and when their eyes met they both smiled.

"It was inane of me. Of course she won't go; but—there is another way. If you were to go yourself?"

It was half a question, half an assertion, and he was slow to answer it.

"Tosh wouldn't ——" he began, and then shut his lips. That wasn't honest. It was something within himself; some strange, unexpected opposition, springing up full armed in his mind, that made the idea of flight entirely repugnant to him, and when he spoke again it was to say with decision—

"No, I can't leave."

Those dark woods beyond the strip of verdure were the woods he had walked through when he went to Löwenzorn, and at Löwenzorn was Hēla. He knew now why he could not leave.

"I have to think of her, too," he said to himself. "I can't go."

"Then," she said, with an affect of lightness, "we must hope that the sight of you and me turning the corner together will act as a deterrent to her little devices. She will not like to see us, poor woman!"

But when they had got to the bottom of the stair and had emerged from the crumbling arched door

into the daisy-pied moat where the world looked such a dazzle of light, and had taken the little raised path that girdled the Schloss and finally led them back to the courtyard, Lilith was not there.

Tosh stood where she had apparently just left him, his figure tense, his head bare to the sunlight. A glance showed that he was moved beyond the surface ripple of his feelings, and that his emotions had struck down to the quick of his heart. They halted their steps involuntarily in front of him, dumb before what they saw ; for this was not Tosh the careless, Tosh the boy, with a boy's interests and talk and ways, whom they had left half an hour before nursing his foot and idly skipping the pages of a novel. That past had relinquished its hold over him, for he had reached the parting of the ways, and his back was turned on the pleasant green lane of youth where he had lingered, perhaps, beyond his time. The face they saw was a man's face, young only in its terrible earnestness.

"Do you know who is here?" he asked, and his voice had a new vibration.

"Yes," said Darnaway quietly.

"You knew!" instantly flame leapt out of those blue eyes that had seemed to look at life so carelessly, as if nothing were worth a fuss. It was as an arraigner, a judge, he spoke.

"I recognised Mrs. Shore ten minutes since from the top of the Tower," Darnaway returned his look steadily, disdaining to refuse the explanation. "I knew no more than you that she was here."

Tosh's angry eyes wavered from his to Mary's. The suspicion died out of them as they met an indefinable look that was perhaps half pity in hers, and they became filled again with intense light, the reflection of that new self within. She had never noticed before how blue they were. He seemed to take it for granted that she, at least, would listen with an abundant sympathy.

"She came out here, thinking herself alone—" he spoke in detached sentences, as if his mind were too full for the trouble of words. "I recognised her in a moment—I have never forgotten her. She said she remembered me, too. She has been here for weeks—all alone. She said it was very lonely. It must have been desperately dull. But I told her you were here and would go to her. And after this—if she would let us—we should look after her—"

"Yes? Dear Tosh," she said gently, "you really must sit down." She took him by the arm. "Do you know that you are standing on the lame foot, and that you haven't even your stick?" she stooped to pick it up.

He looked down and then gave a little, half-incredulous laugh.

"I didn't know. I didn't miss it," he said.

Darnaway, who had stood quite silent, suddenly turned away, saying indistinctly something about the tyre of her bicycle.

\* \* \* \* \*

They would err who should imagine Lilith Shore going to her room in any tremor of excited vanity

after this unexpected meeting with Tosh. She was agitated, indeed, but the emotion that moved her was in part fear, in part a dull, helpless resentment. She had been unhappy before, at her best but dully discontented; and now, of a sudden, that negative unhappiness became active, and she knew she was miserable.

She went to her own quarters, a suite of two small rooms at the other end of the wing from those occupied by Darnaway and Tosh, and reached by a private door.

She had chosen them partly because they were the cheapest and partly because they looked, not on to the courtyard where the chestnuts were lit before the Madonna's shrine, but across the moat to the village inn, where, during the summer, there were many chance beer-drinking visitors, and on Sundays frequent gatherings of the peasant folk, who met to dance to the sound of the zither. Such life and variety as the place could boast, she at least could share in as a spectator. But now, with no thought for anything beyond her own immediate wretchedness, she tossed aside her hat, and flung herself upon the bed, the billowy plumeau rising all about her as she pressed her face down, the flowers she had been carrying scattered on the floor and left to wither where they fell.

If she had been, what she was not, a reasoner, she might have meditated upon that force we call chance, which so ironically uses our most unconsidered actions to the making or the marring of our lives. For Mary



Skelton was wrong when she privately suspected her of some knowledge of Darnaway's movements. That he should be here, as she knew from the very first words Tosh said, was almost as terrible to her as it was distasteful to him.

"Am I never to get away?" she wailed, "never to be allowed to forget?" She had thought the world so large, and it was only a cage with bars that shut one in. When she fled from Little Laver a week or two before, she had set out with the vaguest idea of her destination: it mattered, indeed, very little where she went so long as she put an impossible distance between herself and the risk of a meeting with the Bishop. It had been easy to carry out her plan, easy to overrule Janey's entreaties and objections, and to break away finally from the grasp of Janey's detaining hands; and as she had furnished no address in London she had been followed by neither written nor telegraphed remonstrance from the vicar.

"I am not running away, as you seem to imagine," she said, sacrificing truth to the fever of her impatience. "Should I have ordered a fly and be packing my box—I wish you *would* let me pack it, Janey—if I were? And I am leaving my biggest cabin trunk behind and only taking two hats—"

"Then why not wait for papa's return?" Janey naturally asked. "He will be so vexed. And—it is all so sudden."

"Oh, can't you see that it is just to get away from all the fuss of goodbyes? If I could have walked to the station and gone without my clothes, I should

have slipped away from you, too" (that, at least, was true). "You look as solemn as if I were going to my own funeral, whereas I am only making holiday for a week or two, and will be back again before you and the vicar have done talking of my journey and wondering what induced it! You should be very much obliged to me for giving you a new subject, Janey."

"If you would tell us now—before you go—"

"Tell you!" echoed Lilith with asperity, foreseeing that she should never get her skirts folded properly with tissue paper between the breadths while Janey sat on the edge of the bed staring at her and holding her by the sleeve. "Oh, you are so dense! Can't you conceive that one *may* want a change from the giddy whirl of Little Laver, and even from your society, my dear?"

Yes, Janey could conceive that; and she said no more. Her detaining hands fell away, and she bid her brave soul hide the stab in her heart while she helped her sister-in-law's packing and prepared the sandwiches she was to eat upon the road.

When Lilith reached London and found her way to the counter of one of the great tourist agencies, she discovered that Ober Ammergau was not only a very well-known spot on the map of Germany, but, for the moment, the goal of an ever-lengthening band of pilgrims. The clerk with whom she talked admonished her that she might find it difficult to secure accommodation, since every corner far and near was already bespoken, and there was even a

doubt in his mind as to whether a ticket for the play would be still unclaimed. When she heard of the great concourse of English-speaking people all moving towards one spot she took fright, and after some hesitation finally decided to take her ticket only so far as Munich.

"You will more easily find out there what chance you have," the clerk said, and she assented, though she no longer had any intention of witnessing the play. Munich itself she had fixed on, because the young man seemed to think she would certainly include it in the circular tour he pressed on her notice, and it was only to escape from the thought of that great arc of lonely wandering that she finally said, with some show of firmness, that she would take a single ticket by the nearest route to the Bavarian capital.

But Munich, delightful as she found it, is not a cheap place to the inexperienced traveller, and one of Lilith's standing grievances was that she could only afford to go through life as a third class passenger. Her sense of injustice was the greater because she felt that Nature had made her for a kinder fate: even in her simple travelling dress (bought new for the occasion) she looked expensive: the kind of person to whom guards touch their hats and porters are polite, and whom one associates with a great many trunks and a demure maid in black in the background, and the first floor in an imposing hotel. It was miserable to have so little money that even a back room on the second floor and the

cheapest dishes from the *carte* made an alarming hole in her small store, just when she felt that she could really enjoy herself, and make a new circle of admiring acquaintances among the English and American visitors.

But it was not to be. She lay awake an hour longer than usual one night after counting her money and making wearisome essays in a mental arithmetic that would never come out twice the same, and pitied herself next morning for looking pale, especially as it was against her "principles" to rouge or even to powder. The solution of her difficulty came to her in the chance remark of a fellow-traveller which sent her to Schwarzenwald. It was easy to make a graceful exit when one was going "to a romantic old Castle on the Isar: such a delicious spot for entire rest!" The paleness came in conveniently now to prove the need of repose, and Lilith felt that her firmness in resisting the temptation to tamper with her complexion was at last rewarded.

It was almost as quiet as Little Laver, and very nearly as dull; the woman who waited on her was rough and uncouth; the food was abominable; but, at least, there was no Janey to look at her with eyes of wondering incomprehension: she could do as she liked, and, with Lilith, to lie late in the mornings and spend her days in the woods' deeps in an idleness that was absolute made up in some small measure for the injury of her banishment.

She probably owed it to the habit she had of roaming away for all the sunny hours of the day,

as well as to her ignorance of colloquial German, that she had not heard of the Englishmen's arrival. Marie, bringing her her morning coffee from the inn, did her best to impart the information which was stirring the village to vast interest; but Lilith had never taken any pains to understand the girl and merely thought her a silly fool to chatter as she did.

Thus it was with no note of warning that she came suddenly face to face with Tosh as she opened the green door that led from one side of the courtyard to the terraced garden above the river. The tall, mellow brick wall that made such a sunny, sheltered background for the roses on the terrace, hid from her all but the topmost branches of the spreading chestnuts and no voice within told her of the young man lounging under their shadow, or warned her to glance up at the Tower where the flag was flying. Many idlers passed her window to climb the tower on fine Sundays, and Lilith often wondered languidly why they took so much trouble.

Tosh looked up at the sound of the closing door from the book over which he was yawning, and straightway plunged into his own soul-absorbing romance. After one bewildered, hesitating, incredulous pause for thought to shape itself, his face became suffused with delight. He sprang up, forgetting his lameness, forgetting everything but that she was before him, in the beautiful tender pink and white flesh: she whom he had so often thought of and never forgotten.

"It is you!" he said. "I knew that I should see you again!"

After that unconventional greeting, all thought of formality was clean swept from his mind. She could not but pause a moment, startled and embarrassed as she was, and stammer out a few commonplaces of enquiry and rejoinder. She, too, knew him in an instant, and indeed, the worship of those blue eyes was a thing the least conceited among women might very well hold among her memories. As they had looked at her on that long-ago day at the station, so now they compassed her with devotion. At another time their message, travelling direct from young Tosh's soul, might have set pulsing her sleeping vanity; perhaps, indeed, it gave one flutter of conscious life before an admiration so naïvely expressed. But her self-satisfaction was no longer the robust quality it had once been; it had suffered too many wounds at the hands of fear.

She could not bring herself to ask for Darnaway, but almost in the first moment Tosh spoke of him. He said, shyly, that it was his excuse for making so bold as to introduce himself that Darnaway was her friend as well as his; "and so—perhaps—we may be—friends too."

She did not answer him at once. Her mind was working slowly, and it was so much more full of Darnaway than of poor Tosh, standing there, anxious for only one word or look. Then, with some dim instinct that it was as well to be propitiatory, in case they should talk together when she was gone, she said, with a pitiful effort after graciousness:



"I am very glad to have met you. Mr. Darnaway was very good to me when—I was in trouble."

She passed on, crushing her flowers nervously against her breast, dropping one which he stooped to pick up and furtively secrete; but she took with her the knowledge that not only was Darnaway in the immediate neighbourhood, but that Mary Skelton was there also.

And she must meet them both.

Her first impulse was again to fly, before that inevitable meeting could take place. She sprang from her bed as if to translate the thought into instant act, but at the touch of her feet upon the bare boards of her room came the bitter, swift reflection that she had no money.

Alas! how many a purpose, noble and ignoble, has died at the birth from the same small, hindering cause!

She had no money. But yesterday she had counted out the handful of gold that must suffice until the next quarter's allowance of her little income should be doled out to her by her husband's executor. She had no money, and she must stay and suffer once again that tearing up by the roots of her resown self-respect, that rending apart of the little shelter she had been building anew for her storm-beaten pride.

Oh, surely, surely, God was pitilessly cruel!

And out there in the sunshine, the chestnuts spreading their shade and dropping little messenger blossoms in vain for him, stood Tosh, lost in the wonder and the rapture, the strange, soul-shaking joy



of a first great passion. She was here, under the same roof, breathing the same air, her light footfall treading the same paths—the only woman whom it was possible for him to love. And inarticulately, yet none the less with all its brave strength and reverence, his heart went up in thanksgiving :

Oh, surely, surely God was very good !

## CHAPTER XVII

### "FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS"

MARY SKELTON desired to interview herself, so she turned her steps to the stretch of shrubbery and gravel that surrounds the New Pinacothek. It was the nearest thing to a garden within her reach, though the crop-headed little German *Büßchen*, kicking up the gravel in his nurse's face as he trotted round a tree stump, was the only flower that grew there.

Mary put up an airy parasol of chiffon and lace between herself and the pitiless sun, and sighed for the coolness of the gallery and the comfort of its velvet clad lounges ; but if she let her feet take her there the pictures would instantly make their claim, and conscience, which she had set herself to arraign, would give her the go by.

The modern painters have not, it is true, the imperious, compelling power of the Old Masters who keep state in their great house opposite and exact an undivided homage from all who come into their presence ; but there were many favourites here, too, that she must needs stop to greet, and to greet them had not been her purpose when she craftily inveigled

Mrs. Dewar into showing an eager Fräulein her latest pattern in crochet, and so provided herself with liberty and her companion with amusement for the entire morning.

"Stand there," said Mary to her monitor, indicating an unclaimed space in the stony waste of gravel, "and let me talk to you. You made a boast a little while ago of your magnanimity; you remember how you talked: what fine resolutions you made, never imagining you would be asked to put them into practice. What do you mean to do now?"

The answer was not easy. There were other things as well as clemency to consider. There always are so many limitations to human forgiveness.

There was Tosh. Had she not some right, some duty, even, with regard to this boy friend, going so gaily and with singing to his fate? Mary had not lived to be thirty-three, a woman of a naturally warm heart and kindly impulses, without having in her own person tasted the bitterness of disillusion. The experience comes to most, and changes the pattern of life for all but the very few. It had left a little crust of hardness round Mary Skelton's soul: it had given her tongue a mocking flippancy; it had sown distrust in her of many people who would like to have liked her; it had disinclined her for marriage; and, thinking of these things and of the flowering of her life (or so she foolishly thought), if her trust and faith had remained unshaken, her heart ached for Tosh.

"I knew in time. I was able to set myself free. I was able to keep a hold on a corner of life and begin

to build again," she said, digging up an old memory over which the dust of years had gathered; "but Tosh—" she remembered his face as he had turned to her under the chestnuts—"Tosh will give all and lose all."

She did not deceive herself for a single moment as to the possibility of his "getting over his fancy." It was not a fancy, to begin with, a thistledown lifted again on each new breeze to neighbour some fresh field flower; it was Tosh himself, and all the good and all the bad that went to make up his uncomplex nature. It is the fashion to jeer at love at first sight as a resource of the novelist, a stock property only fit to play at life with; but wise people leave a place for it in their reckoning. Say what we will, the thing happens. A look, a word, and "the instant is made eternity." Mary knew it: she was even clever enough to know that it oftenest befalls elemental people like Tosh, who seem to be commonplace, inappreciative, insensitive, till the fierce flame burning up the shell illumines an unsuspected nature within.

She was very sorry for him. It was as if she saw him about to contract some deadly disease from which she was powerless to protect him.

"And it will be a woman's doing," she said, "and she will do it to add one more to that cabinet of broken hearts she collects! How many men are lured on to love a woman just that she may be able to hint discreetly that she might have married him! And for the sake of one more scalp poor Tosh must suffer."

She moved restlessly on her hard bench. There seemed to be nothing to do but the one thing she had promised herself to do and did not, now that the time had come, feel any prompting to do. "If I could get her to trust me, perhaps she would see that she must go away."

John Darnaway could do nothing. He would never hint anything to a woman's detriment. She was as sure of that as was Lilith herself, who had taken a faint comfort in the night from the thought. He had said he could not wholly trust himself, but Mary Skelton could trust him. She gave a little laugh of pride in him, of pride in her entire knowledge of her friend. He would scorn to use such a weapon as that even to save Tosh, the boy who was like a younger brother.

It was not for her to tell what he would leave unrevealed. No woman can hold the balance with a steady hand when it is another woman's shortcomings she is weighing. "It is not because *I* am chivalrous," she said, "it is because I dislike her too much that I dare not." Besides, it was already too late. Tosh's passion could neither be judiciously checked nor conveniently replaced with anything else. He would think me jealous of her beauty," said Mary, with a mournful smile. "God knows my heart is very hard to her, but not for that."

"If she were a worse woman I could like her better."

If she had been a woman driven by strong passion, by any feeling that was vital and intense, one could

have felt the kind of respect one has for an iron will even when its force is misdirected ; but nothing about her was strong except her desire to sit, in pretty poses, much admired, on the sunny side of life and escape discomfort. Tosh's adoration would only be a ray the more at which to warm vanity. Her very treachery to her child was a sin of omission.

"What can you do with a person who can't even sin heartily? She *has* no heart, nothing but a blood pump to keep her circulation going, and give her a pink and white complexion ; and very well it does its work, too ! If I were good, if I were even prepared honestly to live up to the confession I make every Sunday, I suppose I should feel myself enough of a miserable fellow-sinner to have both love and pity for her, and the kind of comprehension that, seeing all, forgives all. Ah, but it takes a Christ to do that !"

The sun had gone momentarily behind a cloud, and Mary had lowered her parasol and was probing holes in the gravel with its point. Her face was very grave and the lines of her mouth were rather hard. Suddenly some instinct made her look up, and filling the space in front of her, where the little boy had been playing a while before, was the figure of the woman with whom her thoughts were busy. It seemed as if some wave of mental telepathy had borne her thither.

Lilith was advancing slowly, unseeingly, with downcast eyes, and Mary, her head involuntarily thrown back, her lids narrowed, looked at her searchingly. Something indefinable, a certain weariness in her graceful walk, or perhaps an unstudied disorder in

the usually perfect details of her dress, made their impression on Mary's mind.

"She must be feeling utterly wretched to wear a pink belt with those red roses in her hat!"

It checked her impulse to erect the barrier of her parasol between her and Mrs. Shore and let the latter drift by ungreeted. Instead, she shut her parasol—and her teeth—with a snap, and got up.

"Now or never," whispered conscience, and advancing she held out her hand.

"How do you do?" she inquired, making an effort to keep her voice at the calm level it reserved for indifferent acquaintances. "Have you come to look at the pictures? They're a rest, aren't they, after the tension of so much Old Master as one gets in Munich? One feels as if one were standing on tip-toe, without the support of high heels, in their presence. At least, that's how they affect an ignorant person like me. I suppose if I had been educated up to them they wouldn't overawe me as they do."

She talked on to give her companion time, for Lilith did not hear one word. She had started nervously at Mary's greeting, and now her eyes were searching Mary's face with that kind of frightened suspicion that had become an almost habitual expression. No one could say that her face was a mere mask now: an uneasy Soul looked out of those blue windows under which were the dark lines of sleeplessness. Mary found that look of half-defiant, half-cowering distrust intolerable. It recalled in a flash the eyes of a hare she had once seen trapped. She



had commanded the young cousin who was with her to kill the creature instantly, threatening to do it herself if he disobeyed; and the same hot impulse to make an end of that accusatory look in Lilith's eyes seized her now.

"She shall not look at me as if—as if I had gone about telling everybody!" she said to herself.

She took the only possible way, turning with a hand on Lilith's sleeve, forced, however reluctantly, into a show of cordiality.

"If you were going into the gallery, shall we go together? I was thinking about you as I sat there, for I had heard that you were here; and when I looked up and saw you I felt that perhaps we were destined to spend an hour in each other's company. Do you believe in being able to conjure people up by thinking about them? Most of those theories break down before any real test, but this one is certainly supported by a good deal of convenient coincidence. Sceptics would say that, as a pair of tourists, both bent on improving our minds, there's nothing very remarkable about our meeting on the steps of the New Pinacothek; but believers, who lightly ignore such trifles as trains and trams, *might* say I had haled you from Schwarzenwald!"

Lilith, who was still confused, began a hurried, broken explanation. Some people never learn that most explanations are worse than useless, but the desire to defend herself was still Lilith's first need.

"I didn't know," she stammered; "it was a great surprise—yesterday—to meet Mr. Darnaway's friend

and to hear that you and he were here. When I left my father-in-law's vicarage for—for a little rest and change" (she could not bring herself to tell of the Bishop), "I had not the smallest idea I should meet any one I knew in Germany."

Mary felt that she was speaking the truth, and thawed a little more.

"It is always the unexpected people you do run across abroad," she said. "It sometimes seems as if your only chance of seeing your next door neighbour was to take a ticket for a European capital. But this year we are all running to South Germany for the Passion Play, you know."

"Yes," said Lilith, with a sudden vision of the vicar's sleepy little study and the dusty atlas which she had searched so long for that name. "I had thought of going there—indeed, I went to take a ticket, but—I was held back—" she furtively tried to read Mary's face with a side glance. "Some inward voice seemed to warn me. Don't you think it is—rather shocking and irreverent?"

Mary instantly detected the insincerity. "She wants to say something that she thinks will please me," she said to herself, and her answer was delivered bluntly.

"It all depends on what you choose to see," she said. "Some people find irreverence in the Bible itself—the class of people who read French novels to discover the improper bits."

Lilith shrank away really shocked.

"I never read Zola," she said; "I always firmly

refused. Poor Charlie would not have liked it. He always said he hated an unfeminine woman. I was thinking of him when—when I hesitated about the Play. One has to consider, if one has any influence as a woman—as a young——”

“As a young and a pretty woman,” said Mary, remembering the formula, and helping her out with a kind of grave scorn. “You need not have been afraid of any shock to your religious feelings from the actors. They are a simple people, and their devoutness has kept them pure and good. If it were not so, the Play would be impossible. It would be hissed off the stage by the whole of Christian Europe. Of course, I can’t answer for the audience. Many, I hope, are in strong sympathy with the actors; but some, no doubt, go prepared to find impiety and sacrilege in every word and look. They wouldn’t be happy unless they took account of the ugly side of life.”

The talk had, as talk will, taken itself out of her hands and was leading her into perfectly useless grooves. For a minute she was minded to turn back, recognising the futility of effort, but Lilith, who had got separated from her, turned in the vestibule to wait for her.

“I suppose you’ve been here often before? Which are your favourites?” she asked, trying to get the reins back into her own hands.

Lilith confessed to having strayed in once or twice, but she had no favourites. It was very lonely and she had looked more at the people.

"Let us sit down while you rest and then I'll show you mine."

Unawares she placed herself opposite a picture to which on her two previous visits she had found herself greatly attracted. It is a modern picture, as are its neighbours, and is perhaps intended for an altar painting, for it has two wings. She had scarcely looked at these. It was the subject of the central panel that held her. It depicted with rare discernment and sympathy a homely interior: an old cobbler at work before his bench, giving new life to a pile of dilapidated boots and shoes: his old wife in cap and kerchief behind him, pausing to say a word in passing; at the same bench, outlined against the small-paned window in which flowers are blooming, the strong, uncouth figure of a much younger man. So far, all very simple, very homely, but the artist has arrested the group at a moment which you feel may make the tragedy of those three lives. For in the doorway, newly opened, but such a little way as would admit her shrinking figure, stands with the awkwardness of entire weariness a young girl, her head bent, her bundle in her hand, the dust of long leagues upon her clumsy wooden shoes. And if you do not know her errand there you have but to read the words on the frame, in the stiff, old German lettering:

"Forgive us our debts."

The father sits motionless, looking before him. No dawn of relenting, as yet, on the hard, narrow face; the mother has her apron in her hand to wipe the tears when they come too thick for her wistful

eyes to see that shrinking figure. The young man's features are unseen, but he turns a shoulder to the door.

You do not ask yourself if the girl is pretty, for on her face you see nothing but the dead dull despair of the sinner, come to the end of it all, to the husks and the swine : to the very end, even on the threshold of home.

"Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

Oh, the irony of that prayer! How often do we "forgive" with the lifted stone!

"It takes a Christ to do it," as Mary had said before ; but as she took in the picture's soul and meaning she realised that our forgiveness of each other, if it is to be in any far off way like His, must be something more than the mere relinquishing of the stone. Christ said "Go" ; He left it for us, equally in need of His pitying mercy, to say "*Come*, and sin no more."

Lilith's eyes were also turned towards the canvas, but she did not see in it what Mary saw ; perhaps in her preoccupation she did not see it with any realising comprehension at all, but she subtly felt the softening of her neighbour's mood.

Mary's circumstances as a rich spinster with a whole planetary system of needy men and women circling round her, had not conduced to the growth of her sympathy ; but when once it was roused, it flowed towards the recipient like a breath of fresh life.

In this full current Lilith's poor little nature was

swept up and urged along the strange paths of confession.

She laid a small, kid-gloved hand upon Mary's bare, sunbrowned one (she had taken off her gloves as if she were in church), and said in a half-hysterical whisper—

"Oh, I *must* tell you. It wasn't true about the Play. I hadn't any money, and—I was afraid I might meet people. If I could I would go away now, but I cannot, not yet. And there is nowhere to go. I—I ran away from Little Laver because the Bishop was coming—the Bishop of Wonneroo, and if he had told them, Mr. Shore and Janey would never have been the same to me afterwards. I couldn't have borne it; for Janey *does* like me, and she thinks everything I do is right."

"Do you mean that they don't know about—the little girl?" asked Mary, feeling that the probe is often the kindest weapon.

"They had heard that—it happened in the boat—at sea," said Lilith, the colour flushing her pale face, her eyes not meeting Mary's; "and, oh! how could I undeceive them? It would have been only pain and misery, and I have suffered enough! Mr. Shore would not understand. Nobody *does* understand me."

Tears seemed dangerously near, and Mary, mindful of the immaculate grey-suited Americans in wide-awakes, and the tailor-built Englishwomen deep in Baedeker, said hurriedly:

"Come in here where it is cooler." She led the

way into a side room, where a series of architectural drawings attracted few. They were alone in the untenanted space, where there were none to see Lilith's tears if they fell : two disregarded figures, one white and one brown, one talking, the other silent.

"Then I came here ;" Lilith's flow was not broken by the change of seat. She was almost, in a frightened sort of way, enjoying herself ; for was not Miss Skelton, of whom she had always been rather in awe, holding her hand in a firm, cool clasp, and listening as if she liked to listen ? And, with Lilith, to be the centre of attraction was everything, even if she could only be "interesting" as a penitent. And Miss Skelton, moreover, was not very well dressed—only an old brown holland and a hat she had worn on board, though it was retrimmed.

"Then I came here because I had heard my father-in-law speak of it ; but the hotels are so dear, they charge you for everything—no reduction if you don't take lunch, and afternoon tea an extra. I daresay it would have been cheaper in a boarding-house, but one can't go alone to a boarding-house if one is young and——"

Miss Skelton did not add "and pretty" this time, nor did she even smile.

"And—a widow," said Lilith, with pathos. "People would talk."

Mary was unpractised in patience, and she found it difficult to follow the twists and folds of Lilith's mind without a touch of impatient scorn. For, like most volunteered confessions, this outpouring was



only half sincere. Threads of real feeling ran through it, but most of it was as much imitation as the lace on Lilith's cotton frock. She may even have rehearsed it before, since among the amazing things she said was :

"I thought—I hoped I might meet you this morning ; that was really why I came in to Munich."

Mary looked at her in perplexed astonishment. Was that start of surprise, that look of shrinking distrust in her eyes, feigned too ?

Lilith seemed to read the suspicion in her face.

"I didn't *know* you would be here," she said precipitately, and with guilty confusion. "You saw how startled I was when we met ; but as this is one of the days when the gallery is open I came — on the chance."

"Why do you wish to see me ?"

"Because—I thought—I hoped if I asked you, you would explain to Mr. Darnaway."

Mary's eyes darkened and hardened as they met those blue eyes with their trick of beseeching.

"What am I to explain to him ?" she asked coldly.

"Only, only—that I did not know he was here. I would have died sooner than come if I had known ! But he won't believe that ; he will be angry—he will think——"

The emotion was genuine this time ; it choked utterance ; Lilith's lip trembled ; the tears welled up. Even in real distress she cried charmingly, with no resulting red nose, such as is the punishment of the ordinary woman for "giving way." As the drops

brimmed and fell, she put up her hands to hide the pink tide that, beginning at the nape of her neck, rose to her temples. Her abandonment was real for once ; she did not even remember to wonder how her attitude became her, or whether the little gold rings of hair that curled of themselves behind her small ears were showing. And, with Lilith, to forget these things was to take the first small step towards contrition.

"He was the only person who was not cruel," she said in a strangled voice : "and if he would only not think—the worst of me ! If he knew that I didn't come on purpose——"

Mary, as she listened, experienced almost every sort of emotion of which human nature is capable in the space of sixty seconds—loathing, jealousy—*was* this hot fire jealousy ?—the fierce desire to strike that drooping figure into nothingness, and then, since the lesson of the last hour had not been wholly unlearned, a pity that struggled and fought for a place in her heart, and, rending her, conquered at last.

"I will tell him what you have said, since you wish it," she said, after what seemed a long silence to her own ear, "but you need not be afraid, he—he—will do nothing and say nothing to harm you."

She felt that she was pledging him, and her pride in him knew that he would keep the pledge ; but, oh, why was it so hard to make it for him ? So much more hard to promise clemency on his part than to vow it on her own ?

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"Fräulein Hirth has done a whole scallop in my yellow cotton," cried Mrs. Dewar, when Mary entered her room half an hour later. "Really, my dear, these Germans are wonderfully quick with their thick fingers!"

"They excel in the manufacture of the useless," said Mary, "but I wouldn't mind taking my towels without crotchet flounces if I could get a few more of them. I've come to borrow your clean one, Granny for I've brought a guest home to lunch; and I'll take your soap, too, if you don't mind. They put as many obstacles in the way of cleanliness here as if it were a new religion!"

"A visitor, did you say? And you look so tired, my dear—quite pale."

"Oh, no!" said Mary, annexing the towel; "it is only hunger that is preying on my damask cheek. I'm simply ravenous! I must fly, Granny, or that dreadful bell will ring, and then I shall lose my innings!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE VOICE OF THE RIVER

"YES," said Hēla; "I suppose I'm learning German, but I think nobody should be expected to learn it who can't hope to live as long as Methuselah. Grandmamma says it is quite indecent the way I give everything a wrong gender, but the worst of all is the verb. You've got to wind your sentence up with it, you know, and you're generally pretty breathless by the time you reach it."

"If you ever do," said Darnaway. "I get hopelessly fogged. The *Verschönerungs-Verein* ought to take the matter up and provide the weary traveller with seats half-way and sign posts: 'This direction to the verb.' Then perhaps we might get there."

"I suppose it's worth while—to get there," said Hēla, smiling, "but it's rather an expensive sort of education if it takes the whole of your natural life."

"My little manual throws a doubt on that very point to start with, which isn't encouraging. It begins thus: 'Why do we learn German?' Why, indeed! If it's a conundrum, I haven't found the answer."

"You skipped that page," she said severely. "I

know, because I saw your little book on the table under the chestnuts, and the mark was ever so much farther on."

"Well," he admitted, "perhaps I did, but that was because I was anxious to model my behaviour on the accepted German pattern, and 'Manners' don't begin till page twenty. Perhaps you don't want them for 'Beer' and 'Wine' and 'What to eat,' which come first. I see, however, that I started all wrong. When I went to see you at Löwenzorn I ought to have arrived between eleven and half-past twelve in the morning, dressed in a swallow-tail, a white necktie, white gloves and a tall hat. Great stress is laid on the '*Cylinderhüt*,' which I take to be the chimney-pot of ceremony; and the white gloves are only to become grey or lilac when one is on terms of close intimacy."

"You would have looked like a Scotch elder on Sunday!" she laughed, "except for the gloves."

"Or a waiter gone astray. Then there are six prescribed forms in which I might have addressed you."

She blushed royally.

"I didn't give you time," she said demurely.

"No," he acquiesced, "you didn't. But if I had had on that swallow-tail I should probably have been inspired to execute a *pas seul*, and then we should have met on equal terms. White gloves and a white choker at twelve in the morning would induce even an aged person like me to dance."

It was very pleasant to talk nonsense to Hēla,

seated on that sunny terrace with the roses ablaze against the red brick wall, and the sweep of the woodland in front, falling down to the swift, restless Isar. The Isar was the only thing that cared to be energetic on the golden afternoon, except the children gathered round Mary in the *Laube* at the far end near the moat. Their voices gaily pierced the silence and gave it a new sort of value.

The rock upon which the old Schloss sits with an insolent outlook upon the river-valley and the lower heights, has only yielded one strip to the improving hand of man. That terrace walk under the great wall of the courtyard was formed by the patient gathering of spadeful of earth, the patient coaxing of one undaunted flower-lover, setting his own wiles against Nature's craft and winning by his greater *finesse*.

Darnaway's landlord, the owner of a *Delikatessengeschäft* in the city, had a little door in his big, uninteresting personality open to sentiment. He cared not a straw for the traditions written on every crumbling stone held to its neighbour stone by a fringe of interwoven grass: for the shame that cried aloud from his dungeons, or the pride that still had its voice in the broken towers; but he loved roses. He sold his sausages, his Kaviar, his conserves, with a keen eye to profit; but he grew roses for the sheer, rich pleasure of it. Outside the paling that guarded his treasures from trespass, capricious Nature, no longer restrained, did her own gardening. She spread great trees over the slope up which Darnaway had

toiled on a day that already seemed very long ago, and under their shadow she sewed upon a carpet of ground ivy and the brown sheddings of last year's leaves, the wind-flower and the violet; and in the earliest days of spring great spaces of blue hyacinth that looked like "heaven breaking through" the earth.

It was no longer spring, but ripe summer; a day on which one feels that anything might happen: on which one feels as if something *must* happen; as if passion could not lose the chance of so hot a partisan, so bold an interpreter as this rich, warm, incense-laden afternoon, when the very roses were leaning cheek to cheek, and the white doves pirouetted and curtsied in chivalrous courtship on the old Roman wall.

Darnaway, with a small pot of china cement spread upon a newspaper, and a match from his own box, was busy mending a small, fat china doll that had suffered severe damage by a fall from the yellow coach on the way from Löwenzorn. The doll, a joint possession bought with a general contribution of *pfennigs*, who spent life in an incessant passage from pocket to pocket, was for some occult reason christened Napoleon, possibly because his short, black, china hair indicated his sex, and a certain belligerent bull-neckedness of aspect settled his profession. Darnaway's long-fingered, lean hands had the quick neatness of a woman's, and they deftly pieced the injured warrior together while he talked.

Now and then he looked at Hēla, as she sat with



two elbows resting on the green painted table of the little arbour, her chin supported by both hands. The old thorn above them had been trained on a frame to make a little booth over their heads, but a rent where the winter snows had borne down a feeble branch let in the sun, and John had poised a Japanese umbrella to exclude it. In the shadow Hēla's face looked very young and fresh and fair. He had leisure to study the wilful profile, for her eyes were absently fixed on the river. What wonderfully long lashes she had, and how bewitchingly they curled, as if to match her upper lip and the tip of her nose! Her hands were brown—much browner than her cheek, for she hated gloves. Her cheek had a freckle or two also, for she likewise hated hats; and perhaps to the category might be added an objection to collars, for the neck of her dress was cut rather low—it was the butcher blue dress in which he had seen her first, with only a little blue frill of the stuff edging it. Darnaway thought it a good fashion. In England that season women imprisoned their necks in battlements of starched linen and buttoned their bosoms into nan-keen vests, and tied their skirts about their knees in a blind devotion to the behests of Dame Fashion which cheerfully sacrificed alike grace and comfort. Hēla's was the better way, though Mrs. Shore had been heard to remark that she wanted style.

“Listen! do you hear the river?” she said.

Magda gave a childish scream, and there was a ripple of laughter from the further arbour. When it subsided he bent an ear to the hurry of the flood as

it girdled a promontory of sand. The current was swift just there, and the river, flowing in a deep channel, became a richer emerald. The bathing-house, built on piles, stood up to its bare knees on the edge of the sandspit, like a timid wader who dare venture no farther. A minute ago that music of many waters was only the under-note of the soft, indiscriminate chorus that is the afternoon lullaby of sleepy Nature; but now he heard it as if it were a voice calling to him.

"That is how I hear it," she said, looking at him eagerly, "as if it were saying something that I have heard before and have forgotten."

"Every river has an accent of its own, just as every leaf has its particular profile; but it reminds me of a Scotch burn I used to fish in as a boy."

"No, not that. A burn has a different sound, a sort of angry chatter at the rocks that try to stop it."

"Then it must be the Baroo," he said: "that's the only other rapid river I know intimately. The English streams all crawl. The Baroo runs past the house where you were born, Hēla."

"Yes!" she said, her face lighted up with eager interest. "That is it. When I shut my eyes I can hear it. Often and often I have listened to it at night, in the dark."

"You were too young," he dissented. "You couldn't remember that."

"You said it ran past the house where I was born. It must have been the very first sound I ever heard. You can't forget the message that tells you you have

come into a new world. If my mother had lived, I suppose it is her voice I should remember. But she did not live."

"No ; she died the day you were born."

"I want you to tell me about her—and about my father."

"Hasn't your grandmother told you?"

"Scarcely anything. Once she said : 'I am glad you are wholly and entirely a von Glümer.' I think if she had not thought me like my mother she wouldn't have cared for me to stay all these months. She showed me a miniature which is to be mine—some day. I think my mother must have been beautiful, but I don't think I am like her, unless just a little. She was not so tall as I am, and she had yellow hair."

"You are like your father too, and *I* am glad of that, for he was my friend."

"I think I ought to be allowed to be myself," she said. "We don't get any choice of features, but it is nice to be liked for yourself even if you have to be ugly."

He smiled. There would never be much difficulty about that.

"Why does grandmamma never speak of my father?" she asked. "Why should she be glad I am not like him? When I speak of him she shuts her mouth, as if she were shutting down things she had better not say, and looks straight before her. If—if there is anything to tell, I think I ought to know."

He told her the little there was to hear, for he himself only knew the story in outline.

"But there's one thing I want you always to remember," he said. "There was never any reason why your father and mother should not have married except that he was poor. If there was any shadow at first upon their happiness from your grandparents' opposition, they loved each other enough to outlive it. I am sure of that. It only made them the more to each other that they were alone in the world. They had five years of sunshine before you came, and when your mother died, I don't think your father cared to live on even for you."

"I came to spoil it all!"

"No. You mustn't say that. It was just that—he couldn't begin again alone. He caught cold that same winter and took no care of himself, and before any of his friends knew—it was too late."

"And grandmamma never forgave them," she said presently, in a low voice.

"She has forgiven them—in you."

"That is not the same. It was cruel—it was hard."

"Unforgiveness is sometimes only the other side of love," he said; "the rough, under side. There is a great deal of pain to be suffered before a mother's nature puts on hardness, Hēla: a great many wounds and aches; but you have come to heal them all."

"If I had known—I think I couldn't have come."

"Then I'm glad you didn't know, for there's nothing so good in this world as family peace."

"Do you know that I wrote to grandmamma?"

she asked, her eyes meeting his with the shyness of a child making confession. "I didn't tell Tante Rachel because—though she would not have forbidden me—Tante Rachel is very just and honourable—she would have wanted to write the letter herself."

"Yes, I know," he smiled. "I recognise now that your rare letters to me were Bowdlerised, Hēla. Perhaps that's why I didn't appreciate them more."

"Oh, as for you, it didn't matter! But if Tante Rachel had written, it would have been the kind of letter from one old lady that infuriates another old lady. I don't quite know why."

"And then there would have been a declaration of war between Germany and England."

"So I wrote it all by myself, and posted it without her knowledge. I hope it wasn't very wicked, for Tante Rachel thought grandmamma's letter was a spontaneous invitation, whereas I'm afraid I—suggested it."

"I'm glad you did," he said heartily. "It has worked out capitally. And, Hēla, while we're talking, I want to make my confession too. I'm afraid I didn't consider enough how quiet—and dull a life it might be for you to share Rachel's home. I had to pitch in a hurry on some one who'd be good to you, and look after your bibs and tuckers and your teething and that sort of thing."

"Teething, indeed!" she displayed an even row of small pearls. "I imagine I had all the teeth I was going to get before *you* had anything to do with me!"

"Oh, well, the other things children get!—measles, you know, and so on, and the morals and manners they *don't* always get! I wasn't much older than Tosh, and as an old lady and a little child were in an equal degree mysterious to me, I suppose I was enough of a young idiot to think you'd pull together."

"And have you had any reason to doubt it?" she asked, with mischievous eyes.

"No; but when I was in Edinburgh I formed my own judgment."

"I wasn't there, so you could only judge one side. When you were in Edinburgh Tante Rachel wore her *moiré* and her best cap, and you had the silver teapot taken out of the wash-leather costume in which it lives, for you, and the drawn linen sheets and the little necklaces to tell you which is port and which is sherry; but that's Tante Rachel's *company* side. The *uncompany* side is just a nice, comfortable old lady in a turned merino and a white shawl, who suits her conversation to a little brown Rockingham teapot, and who, if she is a little strict, perhaps, is very kind."

"You are loyal," he said, remembering the severity with which the little house in Pleasance Place was swept and ungarnished with any girlish fancy.

"I have need to be," she said gravely, and then the laugh that had been in her eyes reached her lips.

"Suppose you had sent me here instead—I should have learnt German, perhaps, but I should also have acquired a waist. I should by this time be taking No. 7 boots, and be skilled in eating peas with my

knife and have established a taste for garlic and sausage and beer——”

“No more! no more! Before such an appalling picture I give in.”

“But oh, Herr John!” she did not often give him the children’s name, and it thrilled him pleasantly, “if you think you’ve anything to make up (though I don’t) if you want to give me one really great, solid pleasure——”

“What is thy petition, O Queen?” he said, as she paused.

“Take me back with you to Australia! I want to see the river.”

“What river, Hēla?” inquired Luischen the inquisitive, peeping between the interlacing branches of the thorn. “You can already see the Isar from here.”

Luischen, who was rather a stealthy child, had a gift for appearing at the inopportune moment; though, upon consideration, John Darnaway was not sure whether for once her presence was not timely. She had crept unheard along the margin of turf bordering the walk, where any other of the Muses would have charged over the gravel.

They were at her heels now, stamping their thick shoes like a herd of young ponies. Children imitate each other just as grown-up people do, only they do it openly and unashamed. When Luischen stole from the opposite camp, it was a matter of three minutes for the entire body to follow.

The Muses had taken to Mary. Three meetings



had made her an ancient friend. She only took a second place to Herr John because they had known *him* for ever and ever. She was a much more decorative person than cousin Hēla or grandmamma. She had a little watch that shut with a snap in a bracelet, and many rings, and she didn't mind if they got sticky by being tried in succession on forty-five grubby fingers and thumbs. And she could tell stories, the real kind that made you creep and thrill, and oncè, when they were quite alone, she had let them take out all her hairpins and play at Gulliver.

They offered no such liberties to the lady who sometimes came out tilting a parasol over her shoulder and walking daintily in little high-heeled shoes to sit with Mary in the big *Laŕbe*.

Children have a keen appreciation of personal beauty, and they looked at her with round eyes of unquestioning admiration, but it was the admiration of awe. She was like a lovely doll seen through a glass as it glorifies a shop window—the doll born only to be looked at, never to be handled, never to have its clothes (sewn on for life) taken off, or experiments made with its sawdust circulation and its pink smile washed from its lips with kisses. After a silent but prolonged investigation which did not miss a single detail of her perfection, the Muses, as on this occasion, usually left her to Mary. Perhaps the doll simile had awakened in the hearts of all those little mothers a renewed anxiety as to the health of Napoleon.

“Herr John *said* he could mend him.”

“Herr John could do *everything!*” Oh, happy faith!

"He is doing as well as could be expected," said the surgeon gravely, in answer to a many-voiced appeal. "He's a tough rascal, and he'll soon be fit for the wars again. There's a little of his hair a-wanting at the back, but that would naturally come off in the course of nature."

Ruth, who was a practical person, suggested that they should return to the scene of accident and search for the missing china lock, but this was negatived by the general voice.

"Grosspapa was auch ein General," remarked Marta, "and he had a shiny place on the top of his Kopf."

"To be sure," assented Darnaway. "We don't think anything of a General till he's as bald as a coot. The best ideas don't get into your brain while your hair is thick, and if he has a chip out of his leg like Napoleon so much the better. That shows that he has done his share of fighting."

"Aber, it was a big stone," explained literal Luischen.

"*I* think it was the retreat from Moscow," said Darnaway, disengaging with difficulty a match that was glued to his fingers. "Nothing else in his career but that stupendous scare could account for such an extraordinary toilet. Depend on it, the Cossacks were after him before he had time to finish dressing. Don't you see the snow, piles and piles and miles and miles of it? Don't you hear the wolves how-w-w-ling in the black woods?"

The more imaginative of the Muses immediately

took him up and made as though they were shivering in the despair of that historic rout, shuffling along the grass border, and doing wolves and Cossacks and fugitives in one uplifted breath, and meanwhile the reconstruction of Napoleon was skilfully concluded.

"I think we must leave him here to repose for the night," remarked John. "He'll dry up faster, and as he's evidently accustomed to be pretty cold about the legs, I daresay he won't mind doing without his toga for a bit. If we leave it on—it will stick to him for life."

"We couldn't make *Beinkleider*," said Luischen, who had remained by the operator to watch him strike another match on his little silver box. "You see, his legs won't bend."

"I see. I daresay that's what gives him his strut."

"But Miss said Roman *Soldaten* always wore a *Lodenmantel*."

"Something of that kind, certainly. And in a Roman-German garden Napoleon's dressing-gown is quite the right thing, after all."

"What was that fearsome yelling I heard?" asked Tosh, limping along the path with the aid of a stick. "Wolves, eh? I hoped it was tea. Wouldn't one of you kiddies run back to the house and hurry them up? They don't, or won't, understand my lingo. I suppose they think it's fun to swear at them in English."

Two of the children started to obey, and the others accompanied him to the confines of that second harbour where Mary and the beautiful lady were

seated. They dropped him there with a mournful feeling that here was another good playmate lost to them, since it was plain that he too liked to press his face against the glass and look at the pretty doll within. He did not speak much—was there not the window between?—but he looked and looked. The Muses saw that and they knew.

Darnaway, putting the finishing touches to his surgery, did not lift his head as Tosh went by.

There was a suspension of normal relations between him and Tosh.

## CHAPTER XIX

### OUTSIDE THE GARDEN OF EDEN

SINCE the days when Eve desolated a garden, it has always been possible for woman to make the world a wilderness for man.

Lilith Shore was taking the heart out of the summer for three people, indeed, and it was no palliation of her guilt that she was herself more acutely miserable than either of her victims.

For Tosh, perhaps, the season had still its purple patches in those all too brief minutes he could spend in her company ; but for some reason that confounded the prognostications of two such shrewd observers as Darnaway and Mary Skelton, she seemed to find very little pleasure and scarce any fuel for coquetry in Tosh's society.

Darnaway fumed perplexed, but Mary divined a reason that made the fulfilment of her tacit promise of friendship for this poor damaged butterfly an almost intolerable burden. Perhaps, though Darnaway's anger was smouldering because Tosh looked at him with blue eyes out of which all the careless, affectionate goodwill had fled—with the eyes of an enemy—it was Mary who suffered the most.

Who that has not borne them can guess at the pangs a woman endures when first she begins to perceive the secret of her own heart, and knows that it has played the traitor, surrendering the keys, throwing open the great gate, before even there is a footfall on the road or a hand advanced to knock at it for entry? That wound to her pride is perhaps the worst of all mental sufferings she is called on to bear—poor pride that, perforated with many stabs, writhes and shrieks till it almost seems as if all the world must hear its death cry.

“I will not let you die!” cried Mary, sitting up in her wooden bed with clenched hands in the all too short darkness. “I will not let you grovel at my feet and whine for annihilation. I will keep alive my self-respect if I should have myself to die for it!”

She bent her strong will to the battle, but though such conflicts sometimes end in an entire subjugation of the inner foe, they are not won at the first lifting of the sword. Mary would yet look back upon that field of carnage with the peace and serenity of the victor whose sword is sheathed, and whose wounds are mere painless scars; but that day was not quite yet.

Meanwhile, she bathed herself in seas of scorn instead of sleeping untroubled under her dream-compelling plumeau, and rose next morning braced as from a cold douche but looking worn. Emotions are not good for the complexion, and the possession of a heart goes a long way to make wrinkles. Even Lilith Shore was not so entirely absorbed in her own

unhappiness as to fail to notice that Miss Skelton had "gone off."

"Probably she is a great deal older than she looks; that brisk manner is so deceitful, and this hot weather is betraying her. It is telling on me, too," she glanced heavy-lidded at the little, distorting mirror that hung high on her bedroom wall, "but *she* has no secret sorrow to wear her out."

Every morning, at a certain stage of her toilet, Mary told herself: "He does not care for you except as a friend. He never has cared for you in any other way. He never will—never, never, never." She buttoned her bodice to its chant, and brushed her hair to its strains. She said it almost with superstition, as if by constant repetition she could make her mind accept it as her credo. And several times a week, to make belief doubly sure—she went to Schwarzenwald.

That was weak, and Mary despised concessions to weakness in herself as much as in others. She had always prided herself on being a person who guided her thoughts and actions with wisdom, but "*le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît pas.*" The hypocrite heart!

Frequently she took Mrs. Dewar with her to sit—a pretence of crotchet in her hand—and watch the children at play with young eyes that claimed their comradeship; happy Mrs. Dewar, whose tranquil little romance had known no storms, who was always so placidly sure that her dear William had never cared for any one else, though both were fifty before they married.



To make the journey easier to her old friend, Mary, with what the Pension pronounced with uplifted hands in its divergent mother tongues: "reckless," "*ungehäſs*," "colossal" extravagance, had hired for her own exclusive use a carriage and pair, and whirled granny off behind a shabby blue coachman, who made his little horses dance, for there was a *Trink-geld* at the end of every journey.

"You made me go to the Pension, you know," she silenced her companion's remonstrances, "and if you mean to keep me there and don't want to see me bolt, you must give me my head now and then, Granny. If you strip me of the carriage I shall break out in some worse extravagance. Perhaps I shall take to drinking beer at the *Hof Brauhäus*. That must consume a good many *pfennigs*."

"My dear!" cried Granny, quite shocked. "You know you *never* take anything but a little claret in your soda-water."

"No, but drink is the resource of the desperate, and if you drive me too far——"

But Mrs. Dewar looked so genuinely distressed that Mary had to string some more nonsense to comfort her.

"No, dear, not even the desire to acquire a comfortable plumpness, which has always been my ambition, will tempt me to follow the feminine multitude to—the *Brauhäus*; but I might contract some other expensive disease: a love of covering myself with silver buttons and chains, like Miss Carter, or a passion for pokering photograph frames and little

boxes to shower upon my friends. On the whole, the carriage is the safest outlet, and by driving we avoid the ferry, which you never like."

For Darnaway she had also her gay reason. Be sure it was always very gay.

"You want a chaperon," she said, "and while I'm standing in that dutiful relationship towards Granny, I may as well throw my *ægis* over you."

"I want a friend," he said with, for him, unusual gloom.

"You have always that," she answered gently.

"What have I done to Tosh?" he broke out, picking little pieces of mortar absently out of the Roman wall and aiming them at a bed of carrots. He had not reckoned on the leaping up of that inward fire of anger, but he instantly damped it down.

"Dear me, why didn't you prevent me from laying unlawful hands on that precious relic?" he asked. "I've more respect for it than for anything in the place, and I always want to act showman myself when any one comes in to stare at it."

"I thought there might have been a cat among the carrots. I've never yet known a man who could resist throwing things at a next door cat. I knew one person who silenced the music of some midnight prowler with his latch-key, and was immensely aggrieved because no one would lend an ear to his knockings."

"I don't know why he should feel himself aggrieved," he caught at the word, following his own train of

thought. "I may have told him in a casual sort of way not to be a young fool."

"Ah, but that's a counsel of perfection!" She gave a little sigh, but so small a one that it went unperceived. "We are all fools when we are young, and some of us when we are—older."

"Perhaps, but it need not make us turn away from our best friends."

"Therein consists the folly—not to recognise that there are others who know so much better than we what is good for us. We don't realise that till we are wise ourselves, and then it is too late."

Mary knew very well what was the matter with Tosh. His symptoms were too like her own to be misread. He was sickening with the same fateful malady, poor Tosh, who could not conceive that any one could look upon the lady of his desires without being himself equally enthralled.

Is there anything like jealousy for depriving man or woman of the share of common sense with which they have been endowed at birth? And not only of common sense, but of that saving quality of humour which helps one to keep on the right side of so many ridiculous situations? Mary could still laugh—perhaps a little ruefully, when not with scorn at herself: she could see the ignoble side of her own feelings, she could even see that they were elementary and must needs pass. But Tosh had not got so far upon the road of life as to profit by the lesson of experience either learnt personally or finely observed. A million boys had walked down the same highway and

stumbled at the same turn, and he was but one of a million more who would follow, to trip as their predecessors tripped. Tosh's big, young body held a big enough heart, but in all its spacious chambers it had room for but two elemental passions—love of Lilith and jealousy of Darnaway.

His distorted vision saw the past writ plain. He recalled with photographic accuracy every incident of that first meeting at the station: Darnaway's undisguised reluctance to let it be known that he had had a companion on the journey; his refusal of Tosh's assistance, his manœuvre to get rid of him; his avoidance of the subject later when Tosh would have spoken of her beauty and her charm. What other interpretation could his behaviour bear but that he loved her too?

"It doesn't take a first-class plain clothes detective to see that," said Tosh to himself drearily. "He had his innings on that beastly voyage, though it suits him to pretend he didn't speak to her. I never knew him to lie to me, but he's lying now. There *is* something—some secret between them."

Jealousy is not content with its own unaided vision; it applies the magnifying glass, and that little aid to science, as we know, brings out unsuspected flaws and deformities as well as hidden beauties: a hundred little signs and indications that a month or two before would have found him blind now stood out in exaggerated clearness; that inward consuming fire was doing for him what the pinch of necessity does for the Indian trapper: it was giving him a new sense. He had found the spoor.

*There was something between them.* He saw it, though no one else saw it. Not Fraü von Glümer, who came in the yellow coach to call on Mrs. Shore and place her as it were on a secure social basis, and who, under the rusty bonnet which might fittingly have served the ends of a charwoman, concealed a very serviceable brain; not Hēla with her crystal clear eyes of innocence. He saw it in every word she and Darnaway exchanged; in Darnaway's coldly formal courtesy, in her half frightened rejoinder. Why should she be frightened—unless he had done something to hurt her? Quarrelled with her, perhaps? His tenderness for her and his wrath with Darnaway grew till it seemed as if there could not possibly be room in his mind for two such ill-mated passions. Why did her eyes follow Darnaway when his back was turned, with that look in them that was almost an appeal? Why did that expression leap to them, why did constraint lay its numbing hand on her at his approach?

Stab your heart again, poor Tosh, while you would fain stab his because she never looks at *you* like that, because those blue eyes are only languid and uninterested when they turn on you, because that graceful body never loses a single curve when it is *your* foot she hears upon the walk.

"I never knew how repulsive a slug could be until I saw an orange-coloured one," said Mary, with gingerly picked-up skirts, as they paced the terrace. It had rained in the night, enough to refresh the summer world and leave it a-glitter; enough too, to

draw forth this lazy band of marauders. "Nature must have been in one of her ironical moods when she gave them this costume."

"Unless she did it to match the yellow fungi that come out at the same time. I suppose it's something they eat that colours them, but I never saw a slug of this sort on the other side of the river; they're all black over there."

This small morsel of natural history did not seem to interest either of them very much, and Mary was casting about feverishly for something to say when from the crack left ajar of the green door that led to the courtyard a small, low, brown body wriggled and advanced towards them with a fawning, apologetic air at odd variance with the bow of blue ribbon which had worked rakishly round to the pendant ear.

"Mops, you villain!" said Darnaway severely. "I smell onions. You've been making love to the cook!"

Mary stooped down at once, regardless of the orange slugs and her spotless white piqué. "Is this the new Dachel? Yes, little doggums, Mary is your friend! I'll even sacrifice my best calling pocket-handkerchief to your paws so that you may shake hands to your heart's content. Tell your stern master if he wants to scold he must do it in language that a self-respecting German doggie can understand."

"There's only one language for guilt. Did you ever see such an unctuous little beast! There's shame in every waggle of his tail."

"Poor little Mops! I wonder if you'll have any tail left to waggle after belonging to the Muses for a week."

"I was thinking of giving him to Hēla," he said, with an odd hesitation.

"And then there were ten!" she quoted. "Your chances of life are dwindling, Mops. You will be surfeited like a boa one week and left to starve the next. You ought to have belonged to me, and you would have been brought up on strictly old maidish principles: dog biscuit three times a day, and a new ribbon to suit your complexion on Sundays."

"Let us turn," he said, when they had both bestowed a flattering amount of attention on the grateful Mops, whose tail was now stiffened with vanity. "I don't understand how things have got into this—coil. I don't know what to do."

"I'm afraid," she said gently, "there's nothing to be done."

"That's just the abomination of it. If one could fight it out!"

"Do you know I have rather a belief in what the newspapers are fond of describing as 'a policy of masterly inactivity?' (There's nothing like a newspaper for doing a good phrase to death.) It may be a lazy thing to lean on it, but it generally works itself out right in the end. When we fight other people's battles we usually get most of the knocks, and if we win we never by any chance get the credit. It's better to sit and look on, and come in with the sponge at the end."



He was a very distraught listener that afternoon, but she did not mind. Indeed, she was glad. She was talking with a flippancy wholly dissevered from her feeling, to mask her own pain.

"The strange thing is—she doesn't seem to care. Have we entirely misread her character? Have we—have I—been unjust? I would have said on board the *St. George* she'd have given him all he wants now, poor young fool, and without much asking, and now it looks as if he were going to ask in vain. And the worst of it is, whatever she chooses to do with him, the mischief is done."

She could have explained that too—she who knew why it was that poor Tosh's worship, in which Lilith Shore would once have bathed herself, now made no impression on her. How many more things she knew about him than he knew about himself! And she could not tell him.

"I think," she spoke this time with a real effort, "we judged her rightly enough—as she was. But our natures grow—and change. She has had time to think, and she has suffered."

Her generosity did not kindle his. His face hardened.

"Suffered—yes, possibly. In her own self-esteem and consequent comfort. But I have watched her, and I don't believe she in the least realises the thing as it appeared to us. She can't, or she would never flaunt those trinkets; they would scorch her neck and arms. But she doesn't even see the execrably bad taste of it here—before us."

Perhaps not. It was a little cup, and it could not hold much even of the new wine.

Next time they turned, Mary went on alone to the harbour at the end of the long walk where Tosh and Lilith were seated. Mops, scenting cake, had basely deserted his patroness and had hurried on four little crooked legs to pay court to the lady in duck's-egg blue who was trifling with a teacup.

But it was Tosh who bestowed favours, for the lady in blue did not like dogs.

Tosh had had half an hour that day, and he was almost happy. He was talking—little, shaky commonplaces that came out with a jerk instead of all the glowing things his heart wanted to say.

She had listened; she had been interested in his home in Australia, that wealthy, abounding home where money seemed to be so plentiful. He had spoken of it modestly, yet with an eager desire to make it look well in her eyes.

When he saw Mary advancing alone, he gave a little inward laugh of triumph. "He is beginning to see he isn't wanted," he said to himself, as Darnaway passed out at the little postern and went to call Mary's carriage.

"Don't get up," said Mary, motioning him back. "You are dreadfully reckless about that foot, Tosh—no wonder it gets no better! I've only come to say goodbye, and to remind you that you are all bidden to eat my sausage and drink my beer next week. I've been arranging about it with Mr. Darnaway."

Lilith, lying back in the basket-chair, lifted sad

and melting blue eyes to Mary's somewhat set countenance.

"I am not going out into Society. I came here, as you know, for entire quiet. As a still young widow——"

Her eyes fell before a sudden gleam that lit Mary's, and as they rested on her blue dress it did not seem quite convenient to complete that sentence.

"Even as a still young widow you must eat your lunch, and you've already taken it once or twice in my company."

"Yes, of course," a faintly embarrassed colour deepened on Lilith's cheek, already tinted like a wild rose. "It isn't as if it were a dinner-party, and as I should be *so* sorry to disappoint you, dear, I will make an effort and go."

Whatever faltering progress she had made in self-knowledge, she had not yet made the blinding discovery that her thoughts and actions were of supremely little importance in the sum of other lives. It was impossible, in her present stage, for her to realise that Mary did not seek her out because she found her "interesting."

Tosh, who had been hanging anxiously on her answer, burst out with his old impetuosity—

"And I'll come if I have to hop all the way."

"You needn't do that," said Mary quietly, "for I'm going to send the carriage for you, Tosh."

She turned, her white dress fluttered through the little postern and she was gone.

On the much-mended drawbridge Darnaway was waiting.

"Your man is there under the trees. He tells me you are going to Löwenzorn?"

"Yes, didn't I tell you that I had left Granny there? I dropped her on the way to make our '*quittungs*' visit after that elaborate coffee we were invited to."

"I wish you would offer me a seat."

"Do come."

"I can walk home through the woods." He threw back his shoulders. "I want a walk."

## CHAPTER XX

### LOVE, THE REVEALER

THERE was, indeed, to those who had eyes for it, something very pitiable in the utter bewilderment and confusion of Lilith Shore's mind, tossed and rendered breathless by the wind of adversity that threatened destruction to her little house of life.

As some delicate tropical plant reared under every condition of sheltering warmth might feel if it were suddenly thrust forth into the open to share with the hardy perennials the frosts and dews, the rains and snows of heaven, so she shrank in every fibre of her being from this new unhappiness that weighed upon her night and day. Some people seem to be born to live in hot-houses, in an artificial atmosphere of heat and admiration, and Lilith had certainly held that prerogative to be justly hers. For twenty-seven years she had reared a shelter over her golden head, and successfully evaded the little draughts and chills that bring a suggestion of winter even into the springtime of life, and no exotic, set aloft upon a stage to bloom for all men's wonder had received a more unstinted amount of admiration.

An idolised daughter, she had allowed Charlie

Shore to feel the immensity of her condescension in becoming a cherished wife—the wife of a *poor* man, as she sometimes said, letting it be implied that she had rejected vast incomes for his sake. If he suffered early disillusion—if disappointment ate into his soul and made the going out of his spark of life no great grief to him, her entire self-satisfaction never allowed her to discover it. It was a comfortable armour which protected her from many wounds. Even the poverty of which she spoke so pathetically was no more than a picturesque background, a graceful drapery to throw her beauty into greater relief. Charlie let her pose in front of it in many charming attitudes, while he retired behind the curtain to practice those little cheese-paring economies that were not obtruded on her admiring public. He had been well enough off when he married, and by the time he ceased to be well off he had also ceased personally to mind the pinch and the giving up. There was such a little bit of the world left for him to traverse, it didn't matter.

When he died, Lilith had the chastened satisfaction of contemplating herself as an unconsolated widow. Her devotion to Charlie's memory remained unshaken so long as her mourning remained a new and absorbing interest; but when there were signs that her soft, fluffy fringe was suffering detriment from the light pressure of her widow's cap, she began to perceive that it might be her duty—her sad duty—to marry again.

She did not, indeed, go so far as to think of it

as an obligation until she one day heard a sermon preached by a strange clergyman in the little iron church of the mining station where Charlie had died. The preacher's theme was the dishonour we do to our dead by our over-long grief.

Lilith threw up the yard of crape that hid her own mourning face and fixed a most appreciative gaze upon the preacher. She felt that she would like to speak to him and tell him how thoroughly one of his audience sympathised with all he said, and how greatly he had cleared the dark places of her mind ; but there was that horrid old Mr. Gubbins tip-toeing into the vestry to invite him home to tea. For the first time since Charlie's death she walked down the dusty, unpaved street, with its hastily run-up block of dwellings, and gaping "desirable sites" sown with empty meat tins, without turning aside to visit the bare cemetery on the hill slope where another city was gradually building itself too.

"It is so true, so true," she said, pressing her prayer-book devotionally between her two beautifully gloved hands, "and Charlie himself, poor darling, if he could speak, would tell me not to waste my life in grief. 'We cannot bring back the dead with our sorrowing'" (she quoted the preacher), "'but we can weaken ourselves for the work they have left us to do.' I never realised before how *selfish* grief may make us. It was to save me from this that Charlie put that clause in his will about the money going to the child if I married again. I never thought of it before ; I'm afraid I even blamed him, poor fellow,



but of course I see it now. He must have *expected* it; he must have wished it, and he knew that the child might be a difficulty unless there was some provision made for her—well, you shall be obeyed, my poor dear. I will give up the money *cheerfully*, when the time comes. Lilla could be sent to school. Of course I couldn't dream of it *yet*. Not for a long time, and I will never yield to any one unless he is very nice and good and high-minded. I owe that to my dear husband's memory."

Then had come the homeward voyage, undertaken who shall say with what wild, fantastic dreams of social advancement to ease and wealth and position? Visions of presentation at Court in a wonderful gown, described at full length in the ladies' papers; of the approval of a certain Royal Highness, whose praise is an open sesame to the most exclusive doors; of the horizon presently black with eligible bachelors—peers, baronets, "honourables" at the very least—crowded the background of her mind, and did not seem too utterly impossible to come true. Charlie had always spoken of "home" with the fervour of an exile, and Lilith, Australian born, had from her childhood been led to think of England as the land of all delights. For London is to the youth of Melbourne and Adelaide and Perth even such another Mecca as is Paris to the American.

At first all had gone well with her dream. On board the *St. George* she knew triumphantly that she had not reckoned in vain upon her gifts and her graces; she had but to extend her travels and her kingdom over men's senses would widen too.

And then, and then, in one little moment the vision vanished, and darkness closed in upon her life.

It had seemed to Lilith that all her misery was the outcome of Lilla's death, and it was the first sign of life in her shrivelled soul that she now began to wonder whether if the child had lived she might not have been equally wretched. For it was not the one instant of forgetfulness that made her crime, but the long preparation for that supreme act of baseness in the selfishness that had never allowed her for a single breath to consider any needs or desires but her own.

We are apt to think that our sudden acts stand isolated, impulses that come without our volition, but they are stones in the fabric of character which we began to build the day we were born—whose foundations, indeed, were laid before ever we saw the light. After the pattern of that secret architecture our deeds are shaped. And Lilith, being Lilith, must needs have saved her jewel-case and drowned her child.

And being Lilith still, her work of demolition and of re-construction could not but be very slow ; stone must be wrenched from stone of that old structure with bleeding hands, and the new design laboriously followed on many a day of back-broken weariness and well-nigh despair.

But it was something that she began to see the fatal flaws in her temple of Life—saw them by the light of that lamp that first reveals to us the manner and the fashion of our inner selves ; the lamp of love.

Poor Lilith ! it came to her—this great and

blinding revelation—in no guise of happiness. She had talked of and played at love; but now she looked it in the eyes and knew it for suffering.

After her first frantic desire to escape was baffled by that dead wall, the lack of means, there rose in her a feverish desire to justify herself in the eyes of this man so strangely met again; to make him understand, to make him respect her. She cried out for his respect; she coveted it as she had never coveted anything before. He may not have been so good as she supposed him, but at least he was the best man she had ever known, and to rehabilitate herself in his eyes became a need as cruel as hunger or thirst. But the wall of her poverty was as nothing to the wall of his self-control. Alas, she might dash herself against that and make no more impression on it than would a wind-drifted leaf! He never gave her any chance: never saw the anguished pleading in her eyes for some respite from that sentence he had passed upon her. There was no appeal from that inexorable judgment.

He was not discourteous in his aloofness. He had made their meeting again—since on his side, too, it was inevitable—as little painful to her as he could; he was loyal to the sense of honour that forbade him to use his knowledge to her detriment. Never, she knew, however great the temptation, would he by word or look betray her to Tosh. He made no parade of avoiding her when, by force of circumstance, she became included in the little circle of friends that came and went under the shadow of the

old towers ; he even interfered for her greater comfort when he found that her lack of German stood in the way of her convenience. His own German was not very fluent, but, such as it was, it was at her service. So, indeed, were all those little necessary courtesies that a man offers to a woman.

But it was for his own pride he rendered them, that he might not fall in his own esteem from the standard of conduct he set himself, and in every word he uttered to her, in every cup of tea he handed to her, she read her sentence over again. He was polite to her because she was a woman, as he would be polite to the veriest outcast in the street if occasion required. Her beauty, her suffering which she could not hide, had no more power over him than the snow-flakes falling on the rugged Zügspitz would have power to move its heaven-reared crest. Less, indeed ; for the long persistence of the snow can change even the outline of the Alps, softening the curves, covering up the roughnesses, levelling the hollows ; but nothing that she could do, if she should live to be old, old, old, would alter by one hairsbreadth his fixed conception of her. He saw her as he had seen her that night in the boat, and though the scorn and horror had gone from his quiet blue eyes, they had not gone from his heart. They would never go.

Seeing herself plainly reflected in the light of a judgment so clear, so cold, so inflexible, her vanity found no way of escape. Its little trick of self-deception failed her ; her belief in her unshaken supremacy fell like a dynasty before a revolution.

Never again would it make brave show of crown and sceptre. It was dethroned.

Kneeling with the bitterest, because the most genuine, tears she had ever shed, "Why cannot I make him care for me?" soon became "I care for him"; and then indeed at last she knew the meaning of pain.

During the initial stages of her suffering—for she did not even reach the realisation of her misery save by slow and difficult steps—Mary Skelton was her one mainstay. To Mary she clung with the suffocating clutch of weakness upon strength as the bindweed clings to the nearest stake or the ivy to the oak; and Mary, who, in her sturdy force, might not inaptly be likened to the forest tree, felt sometimes as it may feel with those million fibres ever tightening their hold, as if this grasp on her vitality must end in her own undoing.

She was not a long-suffering person by nature, and there were moments when, busy with the subduing of her own revolted kingdom, the burden of this woman's helplessness seemed more than she could bear, and she was tempted to fling it off with scorn and shake her soul free of the debasing load.

But some unguessed restraining force within herself was stronger than her will. In spite of antipathy of temperament, with patience or without it, with a sick distaste and with a pity that struggled hard to find foothold in her heart, she listened to what Lilith called her "confession."

A sorry recital it was, in which self-consciousness,

self-pity, vanity, longing despair, found place, and who shall say how much more that remained unchronicled? The ugliest facts of a confession are left to be guessed at by the absolving priest. It is God alone Who knows.

There came a time, however, when she would no longer grant the penitent this indulgence. Mary's common sense was an invaluable ally, and it told her that the relief of confession, if abused, is apt to become in itself a disease. She knew that there are people so morbidly self-centred that they would rather be shuddered at and spoken of as perpetrators of the worst crimes than be taken no notice of at all, and she put her by no means light foot down upon all Lilith's attempts to pander to this diseased species of vanity. For there is a vanity in displaying the nakedness of the soul just as there is a vanity in decorating the body.

"I will discuss frocks with you, or hair-washes or complexion-powders ——"

"I *never* use powder," said Lilith, with faint reproach.

"But I won't have anything more to do with your spiritual toilet, Lilith. This dressing and undressing of the soul in public sickens me. Oh, I know it is a fashion encouraged in some quarters where one would expect it to be condemned, and I suppose I should be thought very shocking to call it indecent, but it is nothing less. I would sooner see a woman go unclothed in the public streets than flaunt her soiled spiritual raiment for all the world to see how black it



is ; it's the worse immodesty of the two. If her sins are anything more to her than a new way of making herself 'interesting,' they should be for her abasement and humiliation before her God alone."

"I don't know what you mean," said Lilith, shocked in her turn and beginning to whimper. "I tell you of my troubles and try to describe my feelings and you speak as if—as if I was an immodest woman, and I've always been *so* particular, almost prudish! I never *would* have my dresses cut as low as some people wear them, however much the dressmaker might urge it. I've always said I would be *womanly* whatever I was, and I scarcely ever smoke, or anything——"

Mary laughed rather sadly.

"Give your soul a high-necked frock, too," she said, "that's all I'm asking of you ; or better still, put it away in the wardrobe for a while and let us forget it. Bring out that pink cotton you want altered in the sleeves, and we'll talk about *it*."

Lilith turned a large and reproachful gaze upon her friend.

"Do you know, dear, if I were not so fond of you, I should sometimes almost think you—irreverent!"

"I daresay," said Mary dryly.

"And I can't take any interest, feeling as I do, in my clothes——"

"But I can," said Mary briskly, "and I'm sure you don't want to shock my sensitive taste by wearing a sleeve of last year's cut!"

"It *does* date a dress," Lilith conceded, getting up and going to the wardrobe.



“Better this,” said Mary to herself, beginning to rip the condemned garment, “than the hypocrisy of a dramatically arranged repentance. It is hard for her, poor soul; it is hard for us all, God knows, to come down to the naked reality of sackcloth and ashes.”

## CHAPTER XXI

### MARY GIVES A LUNCH PARTY

MARY had gathered about her at her luncheon the stray remnants of the English community in Munich, the fringe of the general bevy which for one reason or another, chiefly pecuniary, had not been able to leave the Bavarian capital in the hot weather. She chartered a separate table for her guests and made some additions to the middle-day menu, not finding it possible to secure a private room.

"We are an *olla podrida*," she said, preparing Tosh's mind one day when she found him alone, "with the German flavour largely preponderating; but really, you know, taken all round, we are fundamentally alike: we accent our ideas differently, but we dip into a common stock. As for our manners——"

"Please speak for your own country," said Tosh, who seemed ready to contribute his old quota to the cause of high spirits. Darnaway had gone to the Roman camp with the priest, and at the sight of Mary seated with him under the chestnut by the well Mrs. Shore had come out. The sun was shining for Tosh. "Or is it a question of the tailless fox?"

I believe you've been learning to eat with your knife!"

"No. I did try one day how many pease I could balance on the blade, but it was a lamentable failure and perseverance would only have ended in involuntary suicide. You must be caught young to do the thing well. I concede the German superiority there; but our conversation, now,—if you heard the ardour with which we discuss our poverty and our digestions, you would find it hard to distinguish us from the best Society."

"There were some really nice people at the hotel," said Lilith, to whom it was a perpetual wonder that Mary, who had heaps and heaps of money, should live in that queer way. "There was an admiral and his wife—Admiral Sir John Cherriford ——"

"You shall have the Admiral," said Mary; "an exhaustive enquiry among all his acquaintances and comparison of prices has led him to the conclusion that you get the most for your money at the Pension Brücker. And in the Admiral's train there has come a little man whom you must have met, Lilith—a Mr. Sinclair, a little white rabbit of society who is always running to keep an appointment with the duchess."

"I felt sure he was highly connected," said Lilith with naïve pleasure, "but I didn't know there was a duchess in his family."

There was a glint in Mary's eyes to which she found no response in Tosh's. He looked at her rather defiantly.

"Don't be angry with my poor little white rabbit," she pleaded. "I don't think the relationship is any closer than that which Chesterfield claimed for Adam and Eve de Stanhope."

Tosh made no attempt to understand her, but as the little spring of interest Lilith had seemed to feel in the man—confound him!—had died out, what did it matter? Lilith had set afloat a boat-shaped leaf of gold on the miniature sea of the stone trough under the Madonna, and Tosh watched its fortunes as if his own depended on them. Her hands with the glistening rings were very slender and white. He looked at them in a kind of reverential wonder.

He was happy again on the day of the feast when he manœuvred successfully to sit by her. The white rabbit—a little springy man in a check suit—was seated far below the salt and was safely absorbed in Hēla. Hēla was so jolly and so pretty, he might think himself in clover to have her for a neighbour.

Darnaway, placed between two stout ladies, did not think the arrangement quite so providential. The English table ran parallel with the German table, but the latter easily scored on the point of noise. Its confused flood of gutturals rolled across the intervening space and threatened to drown the milder-mannered English speech. He was less struck with the blending of the two types than with the persistence of each even when brought into close personal contact. The Channel, instead of a strip of polished floor, might have flowed between for the

greatness of the difference, and yet Hēla had in part sprung from the race that delighted to produce those broad-faced, broad-hipped, cow-like women !

“ I’m glad she’s a Carmichael,” he thought, trying and failing to catch sight of her between the bobbings of her neighbour. “ I’m glad she’s not even a von Glümer.”

As the meal went on, course after course of strange food, upon which he experimented with outward calm but inward misgiving, and the talk round him became disentangled from the trumpets and the trombones and the clashing cymbals at the other table, he found reason to congratulate himself that her lot had not fallen among the young art students, with the fuzzy, ill-groomed heads, to whom Mary had extended her hospitality. They were good girls, no doubt, under all the jargon of their “ art ” talk, their alert inquisitiveness, their tense sharpness in practical matters ; but it is not easy to walk steadily through all the shady ways of British poverty abroad. Poor Rachel, with her limited vision, her narrow prejudices, had yet been wiser than he. This was no life for Hēla. It gave his heart a sudden ease to think of her in the Löwenzorn woods, with all the little cousins about her, and the traditions, the scruples, of a great house behind her. Fraü von Glümer, though she dressed no better than a ragwife, would not go to Mary’s lunch.

“ You English, you do not discriminate,” she said. “ You go to your pension perhaps because you think you will acquire the tongue of Germany —— ”

"Oh, no!" said Mary, "that is a little mistake we soon unlearn. We go to teach your countrymen English."

Fraü von Glümer smiled grimly. "Yes," she said, "you do not learn German, you lack the ear, and you have also no eye for fine distinctions. You do not perceive any difference between the real and the imitation, and you go home and talk about German society. But you must not ask me to meet your *raté* acquaintances. Hēla may go: she talks too badly to understand."

"Thank you, grandmamma!" said Hēla, laughing.

"She will meet the people who go to the English church. Afterwards, I will present her to madam, your Minister's wife. There she will meet the people who do *not* go to the English Church."

"How delightful!" cried Hēla. "The presentation, I mean. Does one make a reverence to him as well as to her? I'll practise in my room with a skirt draping the clothes-basket."

"To represent her ladyship?" asked Darnaway.

"She hasn't *much* of a waist," she said with a small smile of apology.

"Plenty, without waist," put in Mary. "It's a pity when one's witticisms are forestalled, but I believe that has been said before."

"It's a tolerably obvious comment here," said Darnaway.

Hēla was quite clearly enjoying herself in spite of grandmamma's strictures. Once Darnaway heard her laugh. It takes very little to make a young

and happy girl laugh, but withal it is a pleasant sound.

John Darnaway was not cynical. He had learned to despise that cheap effect, or perhaps it would be more true to say that he had sufficient breadth of mind and heart to keep an open door for tolerance. He knew that in no community of exiles must you look for the finest flower of culture. People expatriate themselves for so many reasons (generally unpleasant ones) and so seldom from choice, and in the struggle for existence or in the quiescence of defeat is it any wonder if the polish gets a little tarnished? He was sorry for the aimless, bored-looking men with dowdy wives, the sharp-visaged spinsters, the assertive young girls, every one of them bent on getting two marks' value out of a shilling ; but he was glad yet again to think that Hēla need practise no such sad arithmetic. It will be seen that he was at last awakening to a proper interest in his ward.

The lady on his right broke in on his reverie. Her conversation was a little bewildering in that it began anywhere and ended nowhere.

"Some days start so unfortunately," she was saying. "Cleophine was late with the coffee this morning, half an hour late, and I broke my tooth-powder jar, one of a set belonging to my dressing-case, and then, by the first post, I heard of the death of poor dear Mary Cardwell. Everything comes together, I say."

She upon his other side said nothing. It did not appear to be expected of her that she should talk,



or even listen. She acted as a non-conducting medium, allowing the sentiments of others to pass through her as the Röntgen rays through an opaque body. Darnaway found no phrase in his conversational manual—that mental text-book he kept for such occasions—to fit her, and was glad to be assiduous with the cruet.

The others of the company were mostly of the type one may count on meeting in any mixed assemblage abroad. One comes in time to know it as one would know an unlabelled Canaletto or a Greuse upon the wall, though alas! it has the charm of neither. Mr. Prendergast, the chaplain, was talking to the Admiral's wife. He was bending his long, shiny black back towards her, and asking in his thick voice—grown husky with much begging, perhaps—to take sittings in the chapel. In the ebb of his own efforts at talk, Darnaway heard the shameless proposal.

"They are five marks each, but——" he hesitated with a propitiatory duck of his bald, unvenerable head as his eye fell on her shabby serge, "if four marks——"

The lady looked at him with that subtle change of mental attitude that seemed to lift her miles above the red-faced old man with the dull, conscious, watery eyes, and then, as he was beginning vaguely to feel her aloofness, and to try to lessen it by some stumbling explanation, her face grew a shade less cold. Perhaps she took account—as Darnaway did while his blood tingled with vicarious

shame for the man whom grinding need had blunted to this—of his age, his manifest poverty, his disappointed hopes, his unspeakable daughter-in-law, and decided to be merciful.

“The Admiral will call,” she said gravely.

Darnaway registered a mental call also. “If it’s only to save him from a repetition of this,” he thought; but he clenched his hand under the table in sudden wrath with a system that made such a humiliation possible. No wonder Christianity is brought into disrepute when we starve the self-respect out of its exponents.

The daughter-in-law was not present; she was never found at any English gathering; but a sister whose small annuity helped to eke out his miserable stipend sat opposite Darnaway. He had noticed with what steady preoccupation she had worked her way through the menu, passing nothing by, and now she was much concerned in raiding the almonds and raisins. She slid an orange into her pocket: her skimpy skirt made the theft manifest, but Darnaway forgave her, for there was good in the small, pinched face; it was not nature, it was circumstance, that made it mean.

When Mary withdrew with the ladies into a small inner room Darnaway was buttonholed by a fat man, who readily accepted one of his cigars. The strife of voices and the chink of beer glasses still continued at the other table mingled with shrill bursts of laughter. The room was clouded now with smoke. The German woman, whose rights

are strictly limited by her power to defend them, awaits her lord's pleasure at table, and sits meekly enveloped in a haze of tobacco fumes.

"Ever been here before?" asked Darnaway's companion.

When he replied in the negative, the man seemed to lose interest in him, then suddenly the light returned to his eye.

"I should be very pleased to show you about a bit," he said. "Nothing to do, you know. If you and your friend——" He looked across the table at Tosh, who was smoking with absent, fixed eyes and paying no manner of attention to the overtures of the white rabbit who wanted to know if he was related to *the* Hazletts.

Darnaway excused himself on the plea that he was living at some distance, but his new acquaintance was not so lightly shaken off. He laid out a scheme of the sights it was indispensable Darnaway should see (under the guidance of a personal conductor, of course, who would condescend to consider his services repaid by a dinner and a cigar), ending with a performance of "Tannhäuser" at the Hof Theater. For Darnaway's further persuasion he described the play.

"And then, d'ye see, he falls down beside the bier——"

Darnaway, who was thinking about Hēla and wondering if she would talk and walk with him, caught the words.

"A very natural and fitting conclusion — in

Munich," he said. He was horribly bored, but the man's blank look of incomprehension stirred his humour. Is there a more humiliating experience than to be asked to annotate one's own jokes?

Hēla could not go out with him, since grand-mamma and the yellow chariot were waiting for her in the street below. The coachman had a livery for town, but not so his mistress, though she wore her rusty bonnet with the air of an empress. Her pale, inscrutable eyes were fixed searchingly, appraisingly, finally approvingly, on Darnaway, as he crossed the pavement with her grandchild.

"I had planned a jolly afternoon," he was saying plaintively to Hēla. "You were to fulfil your promise to explain the mysteries of those student corps to me, and when I had learned my lesson sufficiently to be able to distinguish between 'Füchslein,' 'Finken,' and 'Wilder,' my exhausted nature was to have been restored by coffee at the Luitpold."

"And mine?" she laughed. "Was it to be sustained by watching you eat and drink?"

"Oh, you," he retorted, "would already have beguiled me into the Brienner. I know your little weaknesses, you see, and resigned myself to them beforehand." He placed a white parcel tied with narrow pink ribbon on the seat beside her as he helped her into the carriage.

"You spoil her," said grandmamma, but as she continued to look at him it seemed as if a door

in his mind, hitherto shut, slowly opened, and something within took vaguely luminous shape. The vision perturbed him strangely, and yet this new, nameless sensation that it inspired in him was not pain so much as an exquisite sort of pleasure.

"She is only half-German," he answered, scarcely knowing what he said in this new agitation. "The side of her that is English will not hurt with a little spoiling."

"Perhaps," she assented, her eyes still meeting his, and then she added in rapid German: "One changes as one grows old; one loses some prejudices."

Darnaway turned aimlessly down the street as the carriage drove off, Hēla's innocent face smiling at him under the hood, her hand waved in friendly goodbye. The street was one of those long, grey, unlovely ones where Munich houses itself in endless flats, and it stretched in a diminishing perspective towards the west, where the sun would by and by turn its prose for a few brief minutes into poetry of the finest. But the sun was still pretty high in the zenith, and was blazing down with sufficient energy to make any but an Englishman choose the shady side. Darnaway neither noticed where he went nor how he felt; one idea captured him and held him in possession. It could not be—but if it could? No, it was impossible; and yet, unless this new desire was crowned, life would be insupportable.

When he got back to the Pension, the last of

Mary's guests was going. It was Miss Prendergast, who carried away in a paper-bag for the grandchild, who formed part of the incongruous household, all the remaining almonds and raisins. When she opened the bag at home she would find a strip of paper inscribed with Mary's clear, firm signature. Mary hid it guiltily and with blushes, but Miss Prendergast would not blink, except perhaps for joy, when she discovered it. The rough grasp of poverty so soon and so certainly takes the bloom from any nature.

"Well, you soon tired of my party!" Mary challenged him, meeting him at the door when she bid her visitor goodbye.

"I believe I took a walk," he said, looking rather ashamed of himself, and then when he met her eye they both laughed.

"I sometimes think I shall run away, too," she said. "I should if it weren't that Granny has knit (and crotcheted) herself to some of the women here. No, it isn't nice; it helps one to understand a little the disrespect of foreign criticism that makes one's blood boil at home. We deserve it, possibly, but it is sad."

The Prendergasts were in both their thoughts, and he reminded himself that he must bid at the chaplain's auction and take those "sittings" he would never use. In his new mood, this little act of charity seemed a small and an easy thing.

So, too, when he found himself going home alone with Tosh, his heart melted to the lad with a sudden

overflowing of the old kindness. Lilith Shore had begged Mary to keep her for the night.

"I can't go home alone—with those two," she said, and Mary, recognising some new spring of feeling in this shrinking, resigned herself with a sigh. The day was when Lilith would have held the opportunity of a long *tête-à-tête* to be sent providentially to impress her charm upon her companions, "and I suppose, as she has got a step beyond that, I ought to let her crimp her hair at my glass and talk off her feelings for the day!"

The Pension was full, but there was in Mary's room the inevitable second bed always to be found in a German chamber when there is not also a third or fourth. The duty of hospitality was thus, as it were, thrust upon her.

She ran downstairs with a forgotten footstool for Tosh, whose sprain, by reason of persistent neglect, was not mending. They were to drive to Schwarzenwald, and put the horses up at the inn for the night.

After the goodbyes were exchanged the two men fell silent, each feeling the constraint of something unsaid lying between them. In the noise of the streets with the perpetual harsh tinkle of the electrical bell in their ears, jostled along with the crowded traffic on the side of the road, the centre regally occupied with the gliding tram, each sheltered behind the plea that consecutive talk would have been difficult, almost impossible.

But Darnaway knew that it had to come, and



when they reached the quieter suburb Tosh's sudden outburst found him prepared.

"You can't escape me this time," he said, and his blue eyes were full of wild anger. "It's none of my doing that we are here—alone; but, since we are, you've got to speak up, you bet! I'll stand no more of this shuffling. My God! do you think I'm a blind fool that you can hoodwink me at your pleasure?"

"I think you are a fool, if you ask me, Tosh," said Darnaway, trying to keep a steady hold on his patience—"a fool to suppose I'm in any plot against you. You are in love with Mrs. Shore, and you wish her to marry you, or so I infer. Have I hindered you by so much as an expression of opinion? Have I put a single obstacle in your way?"

"You thwart me every day, d—— you!" cried the lad, losing entire control in the blind whirl of his passion. "You say you give me a free hand. What ghost of a chance do you suppose I have so long as there's this secret understanding between you?"

"There's nothing between Mrs. Shore and me," said Darnaway with an energy of vehemence that might have carried conviction to any one less passion-led than Tosh.

"You lie!" cried Tosh fiercely.

"Take care." The blood came hotly under Darnaway's tan; his eyes could flash, too. "That remark is a direct insult, and you know it. To insult a man with whom you've no reasonable

ground of quarrel is something worse than a mistake."

But Tosh, whose face was livid, would not take care.

"You've lied to me all along, from the very first, when you pretended she was a mere chance acquaintance—a solitary woman whom you were bound to look after. If that were all, why were you so jolly careful I should never get near her? You took me to Paris because you were afraid if you left me behind I'd look her up in Essex. Oh, I've seen through your little game. There was something between you on the boat—something you choose to hide. You can't deny it!"

"I do deny it!" said Darnaway strongly. "On my word of honour—you'll scarcely refuse me that phrase—Mrs. Shore is no more to me than any other woman—less than many. I have told you the exact truth as to our relations on board. It was by no planning of mine that we met again here. If you still insult me by disbelieving me, ask her. She will tell you that until the last night of our voyage we never exchanged two words."

"Why does she look at you like that, then?" cried the boy, anger passing into pain. "My God! I love her, *I love her*; and you think I can't see it! She never looks at *me* like that! She knows when you come near. She stops listening. I tell you, she hears your step before I do; and I haven't lived in the bush all my life for nothing."

"I can't say how she looks at me," said Darnaway

composedly, "seeing that I never look particularly at her. If I'd been idiot enough to notice the remarkable things you appear to see, perhaps I'd have hit on a simpler reason for them. I should suppose, for instance, that she might find it a little embarrassing and disconcerting to feel her privacy invaded by two strange men. She came here for quiet, Miss Skelton tells me. If I've inspired her with any feeling at all, you may take it it is with annoyance."

"No," said Tosh with gloomy decision. "You can't come over me with that. If she disliked our company she could have gone away."

"Well, I can't pretend to explain her reasons, but if she has taken the rooms for the summer that would be asking rather a sacrifice of her. Perhaps she prefers to put up with us, or, according to you, to put up with me."

Darnaway's quiet, indifferently easy tones, did a little to allay Tosh's frenzied suspicions. Here was the crisis he had once dreaded, and he found himself facing it without difficulty. If he had been a woman, he would have told all he knew. Driven into such a corner, Mary Skelton would almost certainly have given Lilith Shore away. Women have no conscience at all in such matters. A man's—even an ordinary, average man's sense of honour is different. Darnaway could by no effort show Lilith Shore the long-suffering kindness Mary displayed, but just as little could he betray her. Tosh might be ruining himself by marrying her, but not even to save him

from that disaster would Darnaway tell what he knew. "If she cares for him—if she's worth anything—she'll tell him herself," he said. But he had not very much hope.

Tosh continued for a space to look before him, miserable, dejected, the cloud of suspicion only partly lifted. What was it? What did it all mean? The theory he had built up stone by stone seemed to be falling to pieces under Darnaway's vigorous denials, and yet—Why did she become absent-minded and falter, and her eyes grow large and eager and her colour waver when Darnaway came near? Tosh had not been accustomed to give his honest brain very much work, and if this laboriously developed idea of some secret tie were to come to naught, he knew of nothing to put in its place.

Not for the space of one single second did he harbour the thought that there could be any humiliating circumstance in Lilith's life of which Darnaway possessed the key. He loved her, and so, to him, she was entirely flawless; but this same love brings, even to the dullest, the gift of intuition. The thrill that passed along her nerves when Darnaway drew near communicated itself to Tosh; he trembled along with her and suffered some vague, un-understandable alarm at her alarm, and for these strange, troublous sensations jealousy had but one explanation.

"Tosh, old man," said Darnaway presently, with all kindness, "let's make an end of this. Explanations never mended any matter yet that I know of, and when there's nothing to explain they're the very devil

for making the tangle worse. As I said before, I haven't interfered, and I won't interfere, if you've set your mind on marrying, though perhaps your mother——"

"My mother!" It was Tosh's first infidelity towards that sweet soul, and it is but fair to him to tell that he was instantly ashamed of the momentary contempt.

"She wouldn't object," he said sulkily.

"Well, you know best. I daresay you know my opinion too, without obliging me to impart it. But after all, a man has a right to an opinion, Tosh, and so long as I keep mine to myself——"

"If you don't love her——" said Tosh slowly, not having paid Darnaway the poor compliment of listening.

"Love her! I? Good Heavens!" cried Darnaway with a fervour of repudiation that convinced even the unwilling-to-be-convinced Tosh.

"Then," said Tosh, finding yet another arrow wherewith to pierce himself, "if you don't care for her" (it was incredible, and yet he supposed he must believe it) "then you've made her care for you. And I call that as low down and beastly a trick as a man can play."

"So do I. And if I had played it you would be at perfect liberty to call me a 'beast' or a cad, or anything else you liked to pile on. Not having done it, you'll permit me to say your second blunder is even more egregious than your first. It's worse than folly, it's bad taste."

Tosh, whose instincts were after all, except when he was under the sway of wrath, those of a gentleman, found no answer to this. His misery excused him much, but when he continued during the drive steeped in a gloomy abstraction even Darnaway's large stock of forbearance came to an end.

"Why don't you ask her to marry you?" he said, his own entire powerlessness goading him on to this rash advice. "Why don't you follow up the gift of your heart with the offer of your hand? Then you'll know one way or other."

"I mean to," responded Tosh, doggedly, and the recorded resolution seemed to bring his mind some relief.

They ended their journey, if not on any renewed terms of intimacy, yet at peace.

He was certainly very provoking. With all his solid advantages of youth and health and wealth, he might have been content. And the worst of it was that not even an onlooker could console himself with the easy philosophy that it would all come right in the end. It generally does, and much more quickly than young twenty-one at the height of passion would like to believe. But poor, blundering Tosh was the rare exception the law demands for its proof.

## CHAPTER XXII

### TOSH CLINGS TO HOPE

LILITH went home on the following morning, which broke with burning splendour.

As she left the train and took the precipitous path that led downwards to the ferry, her step fell slow and lifeless in unison with her mood. The trees, now thick with summer's full dress, shut out air as well as light, and the tunnelled gloom was warmed to a hot-house temperature in which one gasped for a free breath. The long, dry summer had left the interlacing roots, making a chequer-work of the path, treacherous as ice. She slipped along in her little high-heeled shoes with small cries of distress which were swallowed up in the silence. There was no one to pity her, or to comfort her for her own deep pity.

Mary had been unkind ; to be sure, she had thrust on her visitor a new dress, one that came out of her Paris box and was still enveloped in its tissue swathings, and she had demonstrated with pins and an inch tape that it only needed a considerable pinching in at the waist to be a capital fit. But what is a dress—even a Cresser—when your life is spoiled ? And when she wanted to talk and tell out all her soul's sorrow,



Mary had pretended to be asleep. Lilith knew it was pretence, for she had heard her furtively yawning.

So few people were really sympathetic. Mary might have noticed that she didn't even crimp her hair—the heat would have taken the curl out anyhow, but *that* wasn't the reason! And she couldn't take any interest in the frock, or wrap her desolation in its artistic French folds.

Ah! she nearly slipped there. If she were to fall and be seriously injured she might lie helpless till she died, with nobody to care. Tosh might be a little sorry, poor boy, but there would be no one else, no one.

The picture was vaguely soothing in its melancholy. She left out of it the prosaic fact that, while there was no great likelihood of catastrophe, the path was a public one, fairly frequented at hours when trains were due and that the ferryman's house was within hail even of a woman's voice lifted in distress; it was more soothing to think of herself borne by reverent hands to the Castle on the heights. There in the last sad state of death her beauty might move the man over whom it had no power in life. He would understand *then*, she thought, and two tears fell for the pathos of it all, though how this miracle of sudden comprehension was to be wrought imagination did not depict. Imagination has a deft way of drawing curtains over inconvenient details and manipulating backgrounds.

It was cooler on the river, and when the clumsy boat had forced its passage over the unacquiescent

flood and she had dropped her fare into the dirty hand of the ferryman, she was minded, being hot, tired and depressed, to sit awhile at the foot of the old Schloss before beginning the toilsome upward ascent.

The man kept his owl-like gaze upon her as he steadied with his paddle the receding boat, but soon the strained wire rope ceased to creak, and he was plodding back across the plank bridge over the back-water to his little red house tucked among the trees. The resisting waters ran free now, a full, clear flood still, though the summer's heat had narrowed the stream's bed and here and there in the centre were lucid shallows and great stretches of naked yellow sand, left a-glitter in the sun as if to make a gold setting to the opaline water.

Under the bank where she sat the current fled as if some alien thing were in vain pursuit of it. That ceaseless flow of energy, that can neither rest nor tire but must ever push onward, always onward, had for her the mystery and the fascination that clear, running water has for all. To the happy it brings brave images, the song and the laugh of a light heart, the triumphant conquest of power and pleasure; but when life is awry and the soul in mortal sickness, what a lure there is in it!

"Come to me, yield yourself to me, and as you lie upon my heart I will give you peace for pain, eternal forgetfulness for suffering, sleep that ends the uneasy dream." What does it say but this, with every rise and fall of its ripples?

As Lilith sat in the still, hot day, she heard the whisper. Scarce a yard beneath her and death's cold fingers beckoned. She watched a branch the river had stolen, a limb of a great pine which had outstripped the woodman's axe higher up the shore : the waves in the shallows had played lightly with it, lifting it from crest to crest ; but when it reached the deep current it glided on motionless, acquiescent, at one with the water's will.

Was death so unlike sleep caught this way ? the deep sleep that is done with past and present and future alike ?

She followed with her mind the course of the Isar seen often from the bank above as it went citywards. It fled in a proud solitude with only the woods to see it go, the solitude of a river too bold and swift and forcible to permit of man's disturbing presence on it ; but long before it was caught between walls and silenced by the louder voice of a city's traffic she recalled one still green reach, an outlet from the main stream where the dead bodies of a myriad pines met at the end of the voyage. Thither to its own kin the branch would go, and thither one day the great trunk from which it had been torn would follow. For the pines stand sentinel beside the river and see their black faces in its glass, and know its inmost whisper, and when the woodman has done with them it carries them shoulder high to their grave.

And—anything else that listened to the luring voice of the waters must needs go that way too, carried upon cool green billows to that quiet lagoon

under the open sky. Would one suffer? would one resist? or was death, so embraced, kind? She shrank with a very real horror from the thought of lying in the lap of the black earth, hidden away from the light and air and sunshine; but it seemed no such hard thing to trust oneself to this cool flood, sparkling as if decked with a million diamonds, clear as flawless crystal.

She knelt upon the bank, and baring her arm of its muslin sleeve stooped down and plunged it elbow-deep into the water. The ice cold of the snow-fed river, cold upon the sultriest day, struck a shiver to her heart—must one pass through this to reach peace? The strong current seemed to drag her by the hand as if it said—"On, on, there is no going back. You are mine now." With a cry she drew herself up, hazardously regaining her balance, and sank down trembling and panting.

"Not yet!" she said as if in answer, "not yet!"

Life, black as was the face it turned to her, was still her familiar friend: she clung to it, seeking deliverance from this unknown Death that enticed one by a way so cold, so pitiless, so cruel.

Too poor of nature not to be superstitious, this sentimental indulgence in a dream of death, whether under the woodland trees or here by the rushing river, struck her as a dangerous thing. Suppose she had been taken at her word—suppose her foot had not been able to keep its hold upon the bank and she had slipped—the relentless Isar would have none of her repenting: it would claim her as it had claimed the

pine trunk, its own to hold and keep and carry where it would. She closed her eyes to shut this destroyer from her sight. Presently, when she had stopped trembling, she would get up and creep away beyond reach of its voice, still calling: "Come to me, come to me."

Soon above its flowing she heard another sound, the fall of a foot and the tap of a stick, and suddenly she remembered that yesterday—was it yesterday?—Tosh had said that he would come to the ferry to meet her. She had tried to forbid him, but now she was glad of this human kinship. There was something so steady, so reassuring in Tosh's large and comfortable presence. He was very strong, his big hands could grip fast. He would hold her back, he would never let the wicked river claim her.

"I was afraid you had not come," he said, and then, as he saw the signs of agitation in her uplifted face, his heart contracted. He sat down near her, on the other side of that sunny rock.

"What is it?" he said, and his voice shook a little. "Has anything happened? Has anything hurt you?"

"No," she said with a little gasp and an attempt, which was not very successful, to smile. "I think I was afraid I might fall into the river. It runs so fast, and—it takes whatever it wants."

"It cannot take you," he said with a sudden relief of the heart, speaking with a bold tenderness, "for I would jump in after you and bring you back."

"You could not take from it what it wants to

keep," she said with an involuntary shiver, her fears still busy. "What it claims it holds fast."

"Not fast enough for me! I've swum as swift a river at home to save a drowning beast. Twenty Isars could not keep you from me."

For a moment she was moved. She would never find anything better in life than this boy's unshaken chivalry. Perhaps she had never before—for all her many admirers—had held out to her a love so entirely selfless and pure. The youth of his heart was hers for the taking, and so often she had had only an old, battered counterfeit—age dyed and padded and curled to look young—offered her. He would believe in her, let the whole world band itself against her, and—if people believe in you—perhaps you become—what they think you. She wavered. Her eyes betrayed the traitor within. Tosh's, fixed on hers, suddenly brightened.

She read that language of springing hope in them, and with a great effort she pushed the temptation away. It took her whole force to thrust it from her; it was like stemming the river with her small hands, but she did it, and in doing it her soul took one little upward step towards the heights of truth.

"It would be wiser to let me drown," she said, "for if you saved me I could never give you the thanks you would desire."

"I would take the risk of that. I would be content to do without the thanks. It would be good enough—to do it for you. No, don't speak," he implored. "I've thought about it so long, ever since that first

day I saw you, and now I must say it and you must hear. I've looked it all around. I *know* you can't care for a chap like me—as I care for you, but I would be content with very little. Just," said poor Tosh simply, "the right to serve you."

Temptation knocked at Lilith's heart again. Truth sits throned very high, and is not reached at one step.

To serve her!—he would serve her well. He was rich, he could give her the luxury her body craved, he could restore to her soul its outraged self-respect. Let her be gently judged if she also passed in her mind's review the houses, the lands, the carriages, the diamond *rivière* his mother was keeping for his bride—these things are very solid goods (especially the diamonds) and make a great show in the eyes of poverty, and these were hers for the taking. If she took them she must needs renounce all chance of maturing that new-born conscience that of late had been making its puling voice heard. Above the flowing river she heard it again now.

"You know at last what love is" (it said), "you who have so often played with and made light of it, and knowing it, and suffering the deep pain of knowing it, can you give him counterfeit for his coin of gold?"

She roused herself to another effort. It was harder this time, for she knew now what it was her hands were forcing back. It required all her strength to push that great establishment with its many servants, its careless plenty, out of sight, to turn one's back on the good things to eat, the fine things to wear. And



after all didn't her beauty count for something? It had been held before to be an asset by men as rich as Tosh. Some of them had thought—at least had said—that it was ample fortune in itself.

"And I would be good to him. I could give him all he wants."

But as she lifted her eyes, half minded to surrender, she somehow realised that she could not give Tosh all, or half, or perhaps not even a tithe of what he wanted. The look on his young face startled her. There was love that transfigured it, but there was reverence too, and something else that instantly raised a great wall between them over which she could scarcely see him. She realised then that her beauty did not count with Tosh, though it had at first roused his passion; he had got beyond that. If by some spell she were to grow plain before his eyes he would love her just the same. His whole honest heart would be hers when she had lost her complexion and her teeth and even her hair; but—there is a complexion of the soul too, and if he knew that the bloom had perished from that——

"It can't be," she said with pale lips, sorrow for him and for all she was renouncing moving confusedly in her mind along with fear. For he was saying, as he had already said in a dozen different ways:

"Only say you'll marry me, Lilith. Not now—not yet—I'll go away if you like—I'll swot at college if you want me to—or I'll go home for a spell, and in a year——"

A year? What difference would a year make to

her pain? She would be no nearer to the end of her penance.

"It isn't any good," she said despondently. "If you were to go away for ten years it wouldn't make any difference."

"Don't say that," he said hoarsely. "I can't give b——" in his agitation he reverted to the slang of the bush. "I can't give you up, Lilith. It's—just everything to me. It's—been all different since I knew you. I don't say I would drown myself if you refused me—a man has got to take his facers standing up—but it would be death all the same—" poor Tosh groped among his feelings. "And if you would try me—there's nothing I would count too big to do for you."

There was no note of distinction in his wooing, but there was a ring of sincerity worth all the fine words in the world. He meant what he said. Oh, if it had only been some one else who said those words, what a world of magic they would unlock! But Tosh had not the enchanter's wand. He could only touch that side of her nature—the sensuous side—over which, though she scarcely realised it, she was learning the secret of resistance. It was not a very valiant victory, since fear sharpened the sword, but she won it.

"Dear Tosh," she said, "you are very good to me, and we have been friends——"

"I know," he said unsteadily. "I'm not going to say you ever let me think you meant more than just—friendship. I'm not going to play so low down as

that. But it makes no difference to the fact that I love you."

"But—if I can't return your love——"

"I'll take my chance even of that."

"No," she said, with all the pain of bitter experience, "there is no happiness in love when it is all on one side. It would stop being love; it would become—misery."

"They say in marriage there's always one who gives and one who takes, Lilith. I'm willing to be the one to give. I'd rather give my love and my life to you than have everything else in the world without you."

"No," she repeated drearily, "it's no use. If I could care for you—for you yourself, I would. I think it would make me glad. I *do* care for the things you have to give me, but they aren't *you*, and without love marriage is too difficult," said this poor learner, set so late to the hard lessons of life.

"Love would come. My God! I would *make* you care for me! Unless——" his face changed, all the old suspicions awoke like a nest of serpents in his heart—"unless—there's somebody else."

Lilith trembled, and the sunny landscape danced before her eyes. She pressed her hand upon the rock at her side till, without her knowing it, it bled. The physical pain was nothing.

"There is no one else," she said, and wondered dully at the clearness of her words. Her voice did not stumble over them. "No one else but you, who cares for me, Tosh."

"Then," he said, lifted on new hopes and gay with the banishment of an old fear, "I'll stick. I couldn't help it, anyway, but I'll keep hold of the thought that there's a chance. If there had been anybody else—I'd have taken my answer as best I could, though it would have been all up with me. You know what we say at home of a chap that duffs another man's cattle—it's a blacker trick to try to steal another man's love; but while you're free to be won, I'll hold myself free to try and win you."

"You are very tiresome and obstinate," she said pettishly, her strength at an end. Had she not been digging the grave of her own hope and reading its funeral service, when she gave him that assurance?

"It's a way love has," he laughed.

"Besides—I am older than you—much older," the admission cost her vanity something.

"Who cares? I shall always be behind you in everything, but I'm old enough to take care of you."

"And—I'm a widow. Your people would hate it."

He winced with a sudden thought of his mother.

"They've only got to know you," he said bravely.

"They will never know me: make up your mind to that."

"I never make up my mind to disagreeable things."

"It is wiser to face the truth."

"What is true to-day, mayn't be true to-morrow. Give the possibility of change a chance; give *me* a chance."

"Oh, you want so much!" she said dully, getting up; "you weary me!"

"Let us go home," he said gently ; "I'm awfully sorry, but I won't bother you any more till—till you want me."

"I shall never want you!" she cried in a sudden access of passion, wholly unstrung with the many emotions of the morning. "Can't you understand that I know what I'm talking about and mean what I say? Never, never, never!"

But Tosh had heard of a woman's "never," and he thought he knew how to reckon with it.

"So long as there isn't anybody else," he said, with a heart that refused to be downcast. "And I can say 'never' too. Never give in!"

## CHAPTER XXIII

### AS OTHERS SAW HER

“SINCE the Muses are for once absent, I will improve the occasion, Hēla.”

Mary Skelton sat with her back against a tree, contemplating a stout, shapely pair of khaki-coloured boots protruding beneath a short, khaki-coloured skirt. Her bicycle leaned against the same pine stem, and her heated countenance testified to the speed with which it had borne her from the city. She had diverged to Löwenzorn on her way to Schwarzenwald to leave a message, and in the outer fringe of woods had met Hēla, who now sat at her feet expectant of wisdom.

“Whatever it may please you to do when you’re somebody’s wife, child, and I daresay you’ll do many foolish things, never try to back up your authority in any argument by beginning ‘as a married woman.’ Eschew that phrase as you would the evil one himself. You may not think it, but that’s good advice tied up in a small parcel.”

“I will remember,” Hēla laughed. “I’ll wrap it in brown paper (to preserve it from moth), and lock it away in the chest of drawers with the outfit grand-

mamma insists on my accumulating ; but it may never be wanted any more than those piles of underthings."

"Oh, yes, it will ; this is a case in which it is safe to prophesy before the event. I only hope when the future Mr. Hēla arrives, he won't be a German."

Hēla, who had couched herself upon the fir needles, laid her head on Mary's khaki lap, and perhaps it was owing to the consequent tilting of her hat over her face that her disclaimer was so indistinct as to be almost inaudible.

"Though," continued the oracle, "I've no doubt the phrase is as rampant here as it is with us. I don't know any Fraūs intimately, but if I did, I can conceive that their sentences would frequently begin, '*als Gemahlin*.' Indeed, considering what a back seat they have to take as wives, it's a law of human nature that they should snub the uninitiated spinster. I shall keep an ear in future for the conversational openings of my Teutonic friends. '*Als Weib*,' '*als Ehefrau*,' '*als Gattin*'—dear me, they do magnify their office with a multiplicity of names!"

"Why is the phrase so dangerous?" demanded the pupil.

"Dangerous? It's simply maddening in its pretension. A bride of a month old has the impertinence to think herself wiser than the spinster aunt who brought her up ! Because a woman has secured a husband (any fool can do so much), is that to say she must be taken for an authority on every subject under the sun? I have not perceived that wedlock



is any such sharpener of the intellect. On the contrary, if a woman is stupid before marriage, the chances are she will become more stupid after."

"That isn't very encouraging. I think I'll remain an *alte mamsell* in spite of the *trousseau*."

"No, you won't ; but you've a small saving grace of humour, and you won't let your absorption in Mr. Hēla quench it. You'll allow, for instance, that I may have a few opinions upon politics, and art, and literature, and even an elementary knowledge of man, not in the sacred and mysterious character of *husband*, of course, nor viewed from the exalted position of *wife*, but regarded dispassionately, as a biped in trousers, with many follies and a few redeeming virtues. In undress, in short, with his halo safely put away in his hat-box."

Hēla, who had a woman's intuition where she loved, laughed again. She was very fond of this dark-eyed, sharp-tongued Mary.

"If there is ever a Mr. Mary," she said, "his halo won't be allowed to tarnish in his hat-box. He'll wear it every day."

"I shall never marry," said Mary sharply. "If you said that, one would take the assertion for what it was worth ; but my dear, I shall be thirty-four next week."

Now it is true that in the reckoning of twenty, thirty-four might as well be seventy as far as the chances of love-making are concerned ; but Mary had qualities which would range her on the side of youth when her hair was scant and grey.

"When I am thirty-four I hope I'll be as young as you," said Hēla, with no intended flattery.

"When you reach that venerable age, Hēla, if, in spite of the *trousseau*, it should find you still unmated, you will understand that any woman who is worth the name learns more by the exercise of her sympathy than by the teaching of her personal lot. I'm not so foolish as to say a married woman can't be sympathetic, but her chances of developing that quality are fewer. What does the wife—who presumes upon her wifehood—know after all of humanity at large? She knows the ins and outs of one man's nature, possibly, and the idiosyncrasies of her own brats, but there is nothing so misleading as to generalise from one's own small experiences. Now, the spinster, whom Providence has not seen fit to adorn with a husband, or who has neglected her opportunities to pluck that honour, need put no limit on her affections. She can mother and befriend a whole parish if she chooses, and generally she does choose! And it is this large and generous investment of her love, with the study and the patience and the insight it involves, that to my mind gives a woman her sole right to pose—if she so chooses—as the interpreter of her sex. We'll start a society for the exaltation of the unwed, Hēla. She shall have sole vested right in the formula 'as a spinster.'"

"I should be glad if the *alte mamsell* had anything of her own, even if it was only a phrase. They take everything from her here."

"We used to rob her, too—half a century ago—

and leave her on the roadside without even the oil and the tuppence for her healing, but we've changed all that. She is having her innings at last, and I believe it's just sheer, raging jealousy of her larger liberty that makes the married woman cling to the spectre of her superiority. She must do something to justify the bondage."

"Dear me! marriage seems to have a very damaging effect upon the morals!"

"It has often a very bad effect on the manners, as I've just been proving, and if you don't take my lecture to heart, Hēla, I will never occupy your spare bedroom or make pinafores for your children!"

"I will ponder over it till I am thirty-four. Perhaps by that time the *alte mamsell* will have conquered the world with her phrase, and then we'll be old maids together, you and I."

"If you mock, you little minx, I shall mount and ride."

"No, don't go yet." Hēla lifted an insinuating arm to steal it round Mary's waist. "There's a squirrel up there wanting his lunch. If you sit very still he will come downstairs to his larder."

"Well, I want mine, and if I don't go to claim it Lilith Shore will have eaten it. There is that peculiarity about German food, it goads you to eat it while it is hot, for if you let it grow cold you will certainly never eat it at all."

"You are going there? But Mrs. Shore is a married woman."

"She's worse," said Mary with conviction; "she's a widow."

"Oh dear," cried Hēla, springing up. "You are a very discouraging person to-day, Mary. I was just thinking widowhood would be such a nice, safe, middle course between the Scylla of being snubbed and the Charybdis of being offensive. Are widows transgressors, too?"

Both had Lilith in their minds. Hēla's young eyes had looked on at Tosh's courtship with wonder and speculation in their clear depths; and not without sympathetic thrills making new and strange tremors at her own heart. What did it all mean, this strange, all-compelling power that men call Love?

"They're the worst kind!" said Mary with light rejoinder, "for they're never content with one experience of marriage."

"Come to Löwenzorn. You shall have everything piping hot, and we shall be twelve to one against poor grandmamma."

But Mary said she must go, and she went.

Would the widow she had in her thoughts marry again? Poor Tosh's chances of escape did not seem to her very brilliant, and perhaps her fears were never so nearly justified as they were at that moment while she was riding under the gloom of the pines. For Lilith, idling in the garden where the poppies with "the fire of summer in their veins" had succeeded the roses, saw Darnaway enter by the little postern at the far end of the terrace,—enter, hesitate a brief second, and turn away again. He was too distant for the slight to be marked; it was even possible he did not see her. But she did not believe in that

possibility. Her dress was white, and against the glowing border of purple, red and gold it must have marked her out with the clearness of a snowdrift in the summer landscape. He saw, and he stepped aside to avoid her.

It was a little thing, but little things have sometimes large issues. Lilith's vanity and her love were done to death in one sword thrust. Unknown to herself, she had been influenced to refuse Tosh by the presence in her heart of one small and pulsing spring of hope. It was little and it was weakly, but it might have grown; it would have fared hardly, it would have nourished itself upon nothing, it would have faced storms if it had not been killed there and then. Poor little hope! Dead in the brilliant sunshine, with the gaudy poppies nodding in derision, and Lilith's white frock worn for funeral rites.

"He never avoided me before." There had been a bitter-sweet pleasure-pain in their limited intercourse. There was only the bitterness left. The end of all things had come.

She trailed her way dejectedly across the courtyard, and found refuge in her room. Slighted love makes a great wound in the heart, and sometimes the only way of healing seems to be the way of revenge. To hurt another creature as one is hurt seems good logic to the sufferer. An eye for an eye is still the law of pain.

"Since I can't have what I crave, and I shall never have it, why should I reject what I can have?"

"That would be a blow struck at him," argued conscience.

"Well, why not?" came the fierce rejoinder; "hasn't he made *me* suffer?"

The stars in their courses were on the side of Tosh, or rather the August sun striking on the slanting tiles. The sitting-room was cheap because it was suffocating in summer, with that bit of roof tied down over its ears like a quaker bonnet, and never before, in her many fits of disgust with it, had it seemed so poor, so shabby, so inadequate a resting-place.

The furniture, a miserable contribution from some second-hand store, showed all its rents and patches in the searching light. There was a hideous beer or coffee stain on the bare wooden central table, that had spread like a map, and in the middle of that unauthorised continent lay a letter from Janey.

Letters from Janey always awoke in Lilith the rebellion which was so light a sleeper in her heart. She could never forgive the good Janey whom she had wounded, since every line of her sister-in-law's straggling writing brought back the old sense of despair and fear. There was, indeed, no longer anything to fear, for even in this letter, so long after the event, Janey harped on the disappointment it was to her father that the Bishop should, after all, have been too ill to go to the Palace. But if that dread were removed, the dreariness remained. "And I must go back there. Summer is nearly over, and when autumn comes, where else is there for me to go?"

Back to the monotony, the poverty, the utter flatness and stagnation.

Unless—unless she were to let Tosh have his way?

It was such an easy, comfortable way, and in its new desirableness she wilfully blinded herself to the perils that beset it too. It need not lead to Australia, or, at least, not for long. She was tired of Australia. Paris, Rome, Egypt, India—yes, India. She let her thoughts go out to the languorous climate, warmth with every device to temper it, tropical foliage and tropical fruits, and a wonderful, luxurious, lazy life with money to spend on every whim, and some one in the background—not too exacting—to think everything one did was adorable. She had never had enough money all her life, never nearly enough, and yet she was made beautiful that she might be fitly adorned. “I could make so much of the money other people throw away,” she thought. “I shouldn’t be vulgar with it, but I should have everything quite perfect.”

Her mind was sliding back into the old grooves. She was forgetting yesterday’s hard resolves, going forward in conscious partisanship with her worst self. Yesterday’s merciful consideration of Tosh no longer seemed binding on her honour. Let him take the risks. Yesterday’s desire to stand well in Darnaway’s eyes was fading before that other growing desire to punish him through the boy he loved.

The shock that brought her back was the sight of her own jewels spread upon the table. The thought of Tosh’s diamonds had sent her instinctively to the



morocco box, and opening it, she laid the trinkets one by one upon the board ; but the sight of them, the touch of them as they passed from her fingers, woke into life an alternating set of feelings that had obtained a firmer foothold than she knew. The good and the bad had no coherence in her nature ; it rested with the strength of the momentary emotion which should struggle to the surface, but that the good should triumph now bespoke some real progress on the hard way of repentance.

Time was when those shining stars and circlets would only have stirred her sensuous pleasure in their beauty ; each liquid flame was like a candle now showing the abyssmal darkness behind. The door of the past was wide at last. Dimly, and yet with a horrifying recognition of the picture, she saw herself as others had seen her, as *he* had seen her, that night when to save these——

With a bewildered cry she sank upon the floor.

\* \* \* \* \*

There were wells of kindness in Mary Skelton's nature, and she was ready to make deep draughts upon it when she undertook to succour this poor sister-woman. Only by that sympathy of which she had spoken to Hēla in the Löwenzorn woods could she have understood a nature so alien to her own, for Mary did not decorate herself with her feelings. They lay too far underground.

She sat down upon the floor, regardless of the fact that she was tired and hot and wanted her lunch, and that her short skirt and dusty boots made the position

rather undignified, and she took the poor weeping, moaning thing into her arms. Even in her abandonment, Lilith's pose was instinctively graceful; tears could not hurt her beauty. Mary was weak enough to feel a little pang; there were moments when she would have given a good deal of the money she possessed to be a quarter as beautiful as Lilith.

But bit by bit, with a patience that she set her teeth to control, she drew the cause of her hysterical outburst from Lilith's lips. Poor Lilith, never "in one stay," ranged confusedly among her emotions and the thread of narrative was difficult to follow. Even in her real abasement she could not all at once be quite sincere; little evasions, little explanations made footnotes, as it were, to her confession; but Mary's tolerance made allowances. She listened in almost silence, and then did the thing her common-sense suggested. She made Lilith bathe her face, and insisted that she should eat and drink. She herself took the tray, with its pewter-covered dishes, from the astonished Trina, and made a place for it at one end of the table, at the other end of which the trinkets were still massed. She did not allow them to interfere with her appetite for the stew, but she could not bring herself to touch them. For they lit a place in her memory too, and shone on the face of the little pale child she had held in her lap.

Lilith declared that food would choke her, but yielded to Mary's persuasion, with the result that her nerves were in some degree steadied, though she continued to be deeply depressed. Mary, fortified too, had had time to think, and at last spoke.

"Lilith," she said, "I do not think I quite understand. Do you mean to marry Tosh?"

"No," said Lilith, shrinking, "I told him I would not."

"But—you left him still hoping, perhaps?"

"Oh, Mary, can I help it if he hopes?" she spoke wearily. She was not thinking of Tosh now. She was living over again the time before she knew him.

"Perhaps not," assented Mary, feeling woefully the difficulty of choosing the right thing to say, "but if you should change your mind" (it seemed so probable that she would change it) "you must tell him—everything."

"I can't."

"You must."

The words were like sword clashing against sword. Mary met the terror in those beautiful violet eyes with a very steady compassion in her own, and when Lilith broke down and fell to crying again she said gently:

"You will see that you must if you think of it."

"No, no, no!"

"You could not take his love on false pretences."

"But I have said that I will not marry him," Lilith sobbed feebly.

"If you keep to that resolution, you are perhaps not bound to give him your confidence. I don't feel that I can judge on a point like that."

"Oh, you would have him despise me too!"

"I would have you truthful even at that price," said Mary sadly. "It is because we shrink from the

cost of entire openness that we women so often make shipwreck of our lives. If we have done wrong, we try to hide it ; if the man we love has sinned, we prefer to shut our eyes and pretend we don't see. But we can't keep our eyes shut, or blind other people for ever, and if—after marriage—something makes us open them—Lilith, you will think I've no right to an opinion, I who have never been anybody's wife, but I have looked on while others made the venture, and nearly all the unhappy marriages I know owe their misery to a want of frankness in the beginning, when it would be easy to forgive. I think almost anything else can be condoned in married life, but concealment is the unpardonable sin."

"And yet you want me to tell—now—after so long a time! Oh, Mary, you make the way back very hard."

"If you did not tell, and if some one else did, or he were to find it out—afterwards—there would be no going back."

"He would despise me," Lilith's voice was thick with tears, "and—I have had enough. I can't bear any more contempt."

"Tosh would not despise you," said Mary tenderly. "His love is too great. He would be hurt, but the place would heal—now. Afterwards—oh, I think I know him when I say there would be no healing."

"I will not marry him," said Lilith, trembling in her agitation. "Look, Mary, I will go on my knees and promise you. I will tell you the whole truth. I did think to-day that I might, perhaps—some

day—because I am so miserable, and there is no place else in the world for me; but I told him last night that I would not and I will not. I know that you have been afraid of it all along, but you need be afraid no more——”

“If you tell him the truth no one will have a right to interfere,” said Mary, amazed to find herself playing advocate to this hated marriage. “It will be between you two.”

“But I don’t love him, and he knows it.”

“That might come. Tosh is very lovable.” It was so difficult to trust this shifting nature.

“It would never come!” passionate feeling rang out at last. “He wearies me. I am sorry to make him unhappy—as unhappy as I am myself, for now I know what it is to give yourself—your whole self—for nothing, but I will never marry him.”

Mary believed at last and was silenced.

“And since you have my word for it—and though I thought of it to-day, I never really could have done it—spare me his respect, Mary,” her voice dropped again into entreaty. “Let him keep the thought of me as—as a good woman. It can’t hurt him. If ever he finds out—that I have been—hard and cruel—I shall be far away, and I shall not see it in his face. I shall not know, and there will be that pain the less. Oh, do you think I haven’t known what humiliation is—do you think I haven’t felt condemned and sentenced with every word and look? Don’t make my punishment harder than I can bear.”

“Poor soul, poor soul!” said Mary, deeply moved.

"I will add no nail to your cross. Who am I that I should judge for another?"

No, it was not for her to judge, though her whole soul cried out for truth between man and woman, cried out with a passion for sincerity, as she had said, at any cost. She hated the blindness in which poor Tosh walked; she saw, perhaps, that in full confession lay Lilith's best hope of re-birth, but she had not boasted of her sympathy in vain. It made her clear-eyed to see the other side.

When, an hour or two later, she was going away, Lilith swept the trinkets that still lay on the table into the little ornamental square of cambric damp with many tears.

"I want you to take them," she said in a shamed voice, yet—alas for poor human nature!—not perhaps wholly unconscious of her own nobleness. "I can never wear them again. Sell them and give the money to a charity."

Mary closed Lilith's little pink palm over the handkerchief.

"Not to-day," she said firmly. "You might regret the impulse. In a month's time, when I'll be leaving Germany, if you still wish it, I will dispose of them for you, and spend the money as you like."

"I wish I didn't think such horrid thoughts," she said to herself as she went downstairs to mount her bicycle, "but it is wiser to leave them. The sight of them may keep repentance hot."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### A REBIRTH OF SUMMER

WITH the waning summer, the passing flowers, the thinning of bush and tree, Darnaway entered on a springtime all his own. The inrush of new perceptions, the invasion of new desires, gave him a more vigorous hold of his manhood, and quickened every pulse of life. The hour of a great passion might seem to have passed by, but in truth, it had only just struck.

The few women he had known at all intimately had been his friends and instructors: he had liked them and been grateful to them, and with a natural sympathy, practised almost unconsciously, had understood them; but till now he had never struck deep to the heart of feeling, never before realised with a thrill of every fibre the guiding force of love.

And now—he smiled with a backward set of his shoulders as he thought of Hēla. He was no laggard wooer. An imperious energy seemed to dominate him. If the desire of his heart had to be fought for, he was ready to fight. Then he smiled again, for the thought of Hēla, while it brought a multitude of ideas and images, woke none that were not peaceful.



She was so young, so gaily sweet and simple; not clever, perhaps, as Mary was clever, but her presence warmed the air. To possess her must needs make a long summer of life.

While he did not wish to startle her, he lost no reasonable or unreasonable opportunity of being in her society. So it came that he was much at Löwenzorn, and Mary, dutifully pursuing the rehabilitation of Lilith Shore, greatly missed the stimulus of his presence when, with a multiplex rustle of skirts, she crossed the drawbridge of the Schloss. For a good deed is done the more gracefully when there is some one to look on and applaud.

To be sure, Darnaway had very little faith in her ultimate success, but at least he admired the attempt, and Mary was woman enough (and therefore weak enough) to feel convinced that he must admire it more when she made it in her prettiest clothes.

But, alas! on the days when her glass told her she looked her best, he was thinking of the way Hēla turned her throat in her little blue frock, of Hēla's voice, as sweet as the ripple of a Highland burn, of Hēla's face, that was all dancing laughter one minute, and gravely pensive the next.

The road to Löwenzorn became his pilgrim's way. Sometimes he linked arms with the priest, talking till the parish boundary was reached, finding a delight in the man for whose creed he had no sympathy, but oftenest he went alone. With the quick eye of a dweller in an unpeopled country, he got to know almost every stone upon the road. The pines

"fallen flakes and fragments of the night," as they stood in motionless fringes against the blanched autumn horizon, were sentinels set to guard the way to Hēla ; their scented darkness made a shelter for her dear head, and somewhere under their shadow he was almost sure—like a sudden radiance—to see her smiling face.

The children contributed their little part to his wooing, since they gave him so many chances of meeting her, but with nine pairs of inquisitive ears cocked for his every phrase, his choice of words had to be wary.

Suddenly one day he had an inspiration.

The whole troop swooped down upon him in the woodland way, the tall girl in the middle, nine heads more or less clothed in nine sunbonnets nodding round her. The sunbonnets, blue and pink and lilac, were a belated importation from Scotland, and before business could be entered on it was necessary to admire each separately. Hēla used the chance his praise gave to unknot all the strings, rearrange pig-tails, and restore round faces to their tunnelled obscurity. How deftly she did it with her pretty brown hands! But the Muses had affairs of their own.

"It is Tante Mary's *Geburtstag* on Friday," they began, in chorus ; then the flutes took up the strain.

"She is four-and-thirty."

"No, not till *Freitag*."

"Miss says she is quite an old thing."

"Then I'm an older thing." He looked at Hēla

and their eyes met. "I was thirty-eight my last birthday." His tone had just a shade of challenge.

She smiled upon him consolingly.

"You are a man," she said. "Grandmamma says no man is worth talking to till he has left forty behind."

"Does that mean that I have two years of youth left ; two years to be young with you, Hēla ? "

"The children don't think you old," she evaded him.

"And you ? " What did their opinion matter compared with hers ?

But the nine wrested the answer from her.

"What did you do on your *Feiertag* ? How many *Geschenk* did you get ? "

"Nobody gave me any *Geschenk*."

"None ! " in a dismayed volley.

"And I don't think I did anything except look in the glass to see if I had grown grey in the night."

Their screams of derision nearly brought down the sky. When he could have chosen his own pudding, and had candles round his cake, and sat up as long as he liked, and skipped his cold bath ! How little he realised his privileges !

Magda, an emotional young person of four, catching the contagion of excitement, stiffened her fat, bare legs, and grew so alarmingly purple in her effort to withhold her breath for a new outburst, that she had to be caught and reversed and thumped on the back, and then bribed with all the small coin in Darnaway's pocket to overlook the indignity and stay her protesting yells.

When order was restored, it was explained that a surprise was being planned for Tante Mary's birthday, and then he understood the immensity of the compliment they paid him in consulting him.

"A picnic," he suggested feebly. "Tea in the woods, you know ; boil your own eggs, and that sort of thing."

"There are no eggs," said Melpomene, otherwise Luischen, that pourer-of-cold-water on other people's schemes. "The hens are not laying, for the Heilige Mary has gone over the hills to meet Elizabeth."

They all stared at him solemnly, as if to say, "How can you get over that?"

He looked his bewilderment at Hēla, and her face besought him—"don't laugh." Reared in the strictest Puritanism, she found a charm in the children's simple faiths she would not have broken.

"I think my hens must be of the Lutheran persuasion, which doesn't encourage such pretty customs," he said gravely, "for I certainly ate an egg at breakfast. But I'll tell you what we'll do ; we'll not have anything so common as mere eggs. We'll have an Australian tea in the bush ; we'll take the tea with us, and boil it in a pannikin and bake the damper on the spot. I'm sure Tante Mary has never had a picnic like that, though in thirty-four years she must have used up all the common kinds."

Hēla's eyes spoke their approval, and the idea was received with acclamation, on the clear understanding that each of the nine was to have a hand in the baking and the brewing, and that Tante Mary was

to do nothing but sit like a queen and wear a crown.

"I'll engage that she does if I've to put it on her head myself," said Herr John. He was so confidently certain Mary would like to be crowned by him.

"Miss" now appeared, a worried line between her eyes. She had been looking for the children in the cowhouses, the stables, in the waste lands behind the farm, where a colony of sallow Italians was engaged in making bricks out of the Löwenzorn clay; her neat black shoes had suffered some detriment from her walk, and her temper had suffered more, for "Miss" was one of those people with whom a mud stain ranks almost equally with a moral impurity, and she returned Darnaway's greeting with unconcealed hostility.

"I've been looking for you *everywhere*, children," she said sharply.

"We weren't nowhere," said Ernestine, defending the troop.

"Don't talk nonsense," said "Miss," refusing to understand that the children had not been trespassing on forbidden ground. "You *must* have heard the twelve o'clock bell."

She gathered them about her and swept them before her as sheep before a very irate sheep dog.

"Hēla," said Darnaway, "don't you feel as if somebody had bitten you and taken the piece out?"

"It's mostly bark," she laughed, "but it's my fault. I always forget and take the children too far. But

it's so lovely to be out, with nothing between you and the sky!"

He thought of the little Edinburgh house in the little Edinburgh street, and of all the attendant ceremonies that there made "going out" a tribulation. Was Hēla hatted, veiled, parasoled, gloved to the fourth button, sedately walking upon pavements, the same free creature of sun and air, exposing her brown, curly head to the liberties of the wind?

"You are a bit of an Australian after all," he said. "I've noticed it coming out in you—in patches."

"I think I'm all Australian!" she cried. "When you spoke about that tea, something inside of me instantly agreed to it. Now, if I had been Scotch, or German, I should not have found any attraction in tea boiled with brown sugar in a pan, and drunk out of a tin mug. By the by, we shall have to buy those mugs."

"And damper. That's a test. It's only an Australian digestion that can tackle damper."

"Oh, damper, by all means! I can rise to that too."

"But there's one part of your education that has been neglected." He saw his chance and used it. "You can't ride."

"No," she sighed. "I had a donkey one summer at Portobello—quite a spirited beastie, with a good deal of kick in it, and I could stick on. Oh, there's Tosh! Did you know grandmamma went over to fetch him when she heard that he was all alone, since Mrs. Shore is in town with Mary?"

He had not known, but he had observed that Frau von Glümer seldom extended her hospitality to Mrs. Shore.

"I have nothing in common with the people who wear their evening clothes in the morning," she said. "There's a whole round of the clock between us."

For Tosh, however, she had a grim sort of liking, in spite of the fact that he took no sort of trouble to reciprocate it. She would have rescued him from the tricks of the beautiful Englishwoman—whose beauty as well as her clothes she distrusted—if he had allowed himself to be rescued, but she knew her limits. For an old lady who managed to create about herself an atmosphere of apparent indolence, almost of sloth, she had wonderfully acute perceptions.

As they went up together to the *Speise Saal* to eat and drink of the fare spread there, Darnaway, tilting himself uneasily in one of the antlered chairs, announced his intention of teaching Hēla to ride.

Tosh kindled to the idea, for, like every up-country Australian, he was a born horseman.

"Of course she must learn!" he said, looking at Darnaway with some return of the old frankness. "We were fools not to think of it sooner, though it's cooler now. If you hadn't a better seat than me, I'd offer to teach her myself."

"Don't be modest, Tosh, or I'll have to tell tales," retorted Darnaway lightly, but resolved, all the same, to be Hēla's instructor.

"You'll like it awfully, you know, Hēla," Tosh



reassured her. "In Australia the girls ride like fun."

"I hope my granddaughter will ride like a lady," said Frau von Glümer dryly.

"Have you anything in the stables?"—he turned doubtfully to his hostess.

"The horses that brought you from Schwarzenwald are probably there now."

"Oh, I say! She can't ride one of those go-to-your-own-funeral beasts, you know," he remonstrated, having already expressed a frank disgust for the flowing manes and tails of Frau von Glümer's Flemish horses.

"She certainly won't be allowed to dock them, if that is what you mean," she retorted. She took a grim delight in Tosh. "If it is necessary to have only a hairless stump behind, there is the children's ass."

"Hēla has already mastered the art of riding a donkey," said Darnaway. "She has just been telling me she can stick on."

"Stick on! By Jove, you should see some of our stockmen!" cried Tosh, his blue eyes kindling, "lean-flanked, hawk-eyed old chaps up to the tricks of the worst buck-jumper ever foaled. Why, they think nothing of roping in a young horse out of the mob at night, and riding him in the morning, and making him obey the reins, too, as meek as Moses. I say, I have it!" He looked again at Darnaway. "I saw a mare the other day over at what-d'ye-call-him's farm—that red shanty half way to Munich—I never can remember their crack-jaw names."

"If you mean Giezelgastein, you might as well be a little more respectful," said grandmamma. "His name is probably an older one than your own, Mr. Tosh."

"I don't quarrel with its age, but I bar a man owning a name that you need a patent sort of mouth to pronounce. It's asking too much of a simple Colonial. But he knows a good bit of horse-flesh. The mare's all right, and she won't take too much sitting on."

"It is I who shall be sat on," said Hēla, looking at Darnaway with bright-eyed mischief. "It's so long since that donkey episode that I can't hope to distinguish myself. I'll be certain to tumble off!"

"You'll get along all right," said Tosh comfortably. "Why, you've Australian blood in you."

"No," she began, and then, with a glance at her grandmother, she stopped.

"Hēla is a von Glümer," said grandmamma, with a tightening of her mouth, "but we have yet to breed the first coward in the family."

Hēla was not destined to play that unenviable part. The mare, duly interviewed by the Australians, was found to justify Tosh's praise, and Darnaway, after a little trouble, secured a mount for himself. Meanwhile, with Mary's help, Hēla had provided herself with a habit which that critical adviser allowed might pass muster—in Germany.

"I don't know what it is about the things one gets made over here," she said. "Germany floods the world with cheap costumes, and half London walks

about in them, but the shop-girls and maid-servants who wear them at home don't look 'made in Germany,' as an Englishwoman invariably does who yields herself to the best *Schneiderinn* here. That skirt does not sit, Hēla. It hangs abominably. I hope you'll leave it behind you when you go home."

"Oh, yes! I'll make it into a winter great coat for the horse I'll have to leave behind too."

She proved herself an apt pupil, and the rides opened a new door of delight to her. What they were to him let any lover tell! He did not wish to hurry or to frighten her, but every day her confidence in him grew, her frankness revealed new traits in a nature wholly lovable. And at last he had her to himself with none to come between, alone side by side, as they rode down the long forest clearings, a lifting of light dust behind them as their horses flew; before them, the long, sombre aisle shot with spears of quivering sunlight, and in distant perspective, the blur of blue mountains. The loneliness, the naked monotony, might have palled upon a solitary traveller; but with hoofs that thudded in unison, and hearts that rose and fell as in one breath, and, linking them still more closely, that subtle, undefinable something which the passion mounting in his own veins seemed to stir to a struggling response in her's—not yet love, perhaps, so much as an unquiet inrush of new feelings half repelled, half courted—how could he but wish that they might ride thus for ever?

From the window of the Ritter Saal, Frau von

Glümer saw them go, but if her pale, inscrutable eyes saw beyond the black trees and the faded sky to that unmapped distance where the mind makes its explorations, she said nothing.

Tosh said nothing either, except also with his eyes, as he walked critically round the mare before helping Hēla to mount on those days when the riders made Schwarzenwald their goal, but Tosh's eyes were traitors, and they spoke his envy.

"Why don't you come with us?" said Hēla, bending down from her saddle, divining his thirst for the easy swing of a horse under him.

He shook his head and picked up poor Mops, who was cringing on four low legs and blubbering to go. If he had spoken, it would have been to say: "Mrs. Shore does not ride."

He had suggested it long ago, but she had confessed to a timidity that almost mounted to a dislike of horses. She neither loved the horse nor the dog which had all his life had so big a place in his simple heart, and yet he found only a reverent tenderness for this weakness which in any other woman he would have counted a serious flaw. Poor Tosh!

Mary, who had been queen of the picnic, found her brief reign over. Her visits to the Schloss had lost all their interest since the rides began. Her honesty suffered a shock when she discovered this, for with our facile habit of self-deception, it is so hard to strip our motives to the naked bones of them; but the revelation did not keep her back a single day. She set her teeth, held up her chin and went. She would

not withdraw her hand from what it had found to do because there was to be no applause.

Lilith's contrition had now taken the form which Mary's shrewdness had somewhat cynically forecasted. She had of late haunted the little church whose door stood all day wide, with no wonder-working mechanism to shut it in the face of an avowed heretic. She spoke of the comfort there was in entire surrender of the will to the spiritual keeping of the Catholic Church ; she hinted at her own possible absorption within its fold. Mary knew that it was only an emotional phase, a fresh way of presenting herself to her own consciousness in a picturesque light. The bonnet of the Salvation Lass (though less becoming), the modest sobriety of the Quaker poke, would have answered just as well as the veil she saw in fancy hiding her shining hair.

But Mary had become recently conscious of a second side to her own nature, a side that, in its plea for tenderness and gentle judgment, warred with the light contempt she felt for phases and feelings that could not be weighed by her own practical common-sense standard.

There was no glamour for her in the trinkets and trumpery of Rome ; no temptation in the religion that professes to worship the Son and raises altars to the Mother, and yet when Lilith knelt for hours before the tawdry shrine of some staring, painted Madonna, or listened in a pale abstraction to the good priest intoning through his nose, she found herself conceiving that out of these devotional heats

some sparks might be struck which would kindle a real, restoring flame. If the fire were there, it would matter little at what torch it were lit.

Driving towards Schwarzenwald one rather bleak afternoon with Mrs. Dewar, Mary proposed to restore circulation to her chilled feet by walking through the village, leaving her old friend, whose toes were comfortably encased in a fur muff, to drive on to the Schloss.

She examined with lively interest the group of *châlets* scattered round an oblong scrap of green, shook a vigorous head at their unhygienic surroundings, and renewed acquaintance with several shaven-pollled youngsters with whom she had held parley from time to time to an accompaniment of native "sugar bools," and walking on briskly round the corner, came face to face with Lilith, looking rather pinched and chill in white muslin.

She linked a proprietary arm within Mary's—how well Mary knew that clutch, which seemed to ask so much more than mere physical support.

"Come with me," she said, indicating with a motion of her free hand the little church set on its small eminence, and dominating with the onion-like bulb that crowned its stumpy tower the whole flat country-side.

Mary did not want to go in there where the mingled odour of stale incense, decaying flowers, and tallow candles offended her fastidiousness; but she yielded so far as to enter the churchyard. She liked that acre sown with crosses much better than the interior. The tawdriness overflowed there too, in



hideous wreaths of lead or of china, or in still more shudder-awakening paper flowers, but the inscriptions on the crosses were often touching in their mournful simplicity and their unquestioning faith. It was German sentimentalism still, but it did not jar, as it does in its everyday manifestations.

And above all, she liked the wide sweep of world which this City of the Dead commanded, so near to the old houses its citizens had quitted, and yet so suggestive of a larger life in the miles and miles of forest and plain, mountain and river over which the eye could roam.

She checked Lilith's intention to draw her inside the porch, and they stood for a minute looking at a prospect which for one of them never palled.

As they lingered, Lilith uninterested, but listlessly resigned, Mary's keen, quick glance noting every detail, a sound of hoofs broke from the road that, to the left, skirted the hillock. Both heard it, and turned to watch for the riders. They came on at rather a slow pace, neither Darnaway nor Hēla looking up. Darnaway, indeed, was talking, his head bent a little towards his companion. They could hear his voice though not his words, and it was something definable, wholly significant in his attitude as he spoke, and in Hēla's as she listened, that came with the shock of a revelation upon both the watchers. It was as if a veil were lifted, and something hitherto all unguessed at, never reckoned with by either in the confused summing up of hope and fear, were revealed.



It was Hēla whom he loved !

The riders disappeared in the hollow, the sound of hoofs dying slowly.

Lilith, with a low cry of supreme wretchedness, wrenched her arm from Mary's, and tottered along the little path between the crosses to the church. Hope is slow to kill ; she had thought it dead, but it lived still, lived to find its grave among those other graves.

Mary stood for a long time quite still, looking before her. Then slowly, out of the exhausting surge and whirl of her thoughts rose the image of Lilith with the miserable eyes and working mouth. Her mind, gathering its strength, resented it with a fierce force. "Why must I think of her?" her soul rebelled. "Is not my own defeat enough?" The clutch upon her arm had been voluntarily withdrawn—mechanically she glanced at the sleeve of her jacket;—must she be the one to offer its support again, to lift that intolerable burden once more, to bow herself, whose pride was already trodden underfoot, beneath the load of this woman's misery?

"I could bear it for myself," pride averred, "but to bear it for her, to have it discussed, profaned every day, oh, it is too much, too much to ask!"

Yet, in spite of that hot inward antagonism, in spite of the new perception of all she was dooming herself to suffer in becoming Lilith's consoler, her body dragged her rebelling mind to the church porch. Her feet took her over the threshold, she scarce knew

how, and up the little aisle between the narrow pews and the stations of the cross. And then, by a miracle that was yet no miracle, though Mother Mary among her paper roses looked down on it with her unchanging smile—the bands about her heart were loosed, and love, which she had so fiercely striven to shut out, flowed in.

Upon the cold stone pavement in front of the altar, in a poignancy of emotion that at last forgot to pose, Lilith had flung herself, and stooping down, Mary took her in her strong, protecting arms. It was her own Calvary she was facing, but He whose blessed feet first trod that way has made it possible for all who follow in His steps.

She understood at last that only love that is great enough to crucify self, dare stoop to save.

With Lilith's weary head fallen upon her shoulder, the two women knelt where sorrow had so often knelt before, and clung and wept together.

## CHAPTER XXV

### LILITH IS LEFT ALONE

A BREEZE in the night carried on its wings all the poppy petals and the gardener made harvest of the full seed balls before cutting down the straggling foliage. The beauty of the terrace was gone—the pageant of summer over, and down the glades by the river the trees were sighing and sighing for the daily toll of leaves which August exacted in handing the country over to the winds and rains of September.

The broken weather interrupted the rides : it made an end, too, of those saunterings in the garden, those meetings for coffee in the arbour which were the only landmarks in Tosh's day ; and, despairing of seeing Lilith, he was driven to knock the balls about on the billiard table at the inn. The fat landlord welcomed him with *empressement*, for few holiday-makers now came so far afield on a Sunday, and all that had made summer lively—the jodelling with which one little shop-boy hailed his fellow across the river, the *Schüplattel* dance with its wonderful mixture of savagery and grace, the whoopings and the yellings begotten of much beer with which some student band made night hideous, the Chinese lanterns swaying in

the soft darkness, the coloured lights, red and blue, flaring their impertinent garishness upon the old, old walls and ruined towers, the sound of fiddles, the tramp of soldiers, the musical drill of school children under the chestnuts in the courtyard—all belonged to a yesterday which was already to-morrow.

There was time now to pick up the greasy papers that strewed the ground like leaves in Vallombrosa: to chase predatory hens and prowling dogs, and sadly store in an outhouse the beer-stained tables and green benches: to pay off Greta and Trina, who from dawn to starlight had washed mugs, glasses, and platters with a fury of energy. It was the end of the summer, and Tosh felt as if something in him was stopped too, by a barrier he could not cross.

He had kept his word. He had not again pressed Lilith. Perhaps he laboured under the difficulty of finding it easier to say little and mean much than to practise the converse, as is the way of more experienced wooers.

"I'm idling here, only marking time," he said gloomily to himself; nevertheless, when Mary wrote that Mrs. Dewar had caught a bad cold with threatenings of bronchial trouble, and Darnaway suddenly made up his mind to go to town, he hotly rebelled.

"What's the good?" he demanded. "What can you do if you go? You can't nurse the old woman."

Darnaway had an idea, which he modestly expressed, that Mary might find a use for him. They were only two women, after all, and in a strange land, and one of them ill.

"Can't see what help you can give her," Tosh said moodily, "and I hate Munich."

"There are other places—even in Germany——"

But this suggestion was received with open scorn. There was only one spot on the map of Germany for Tosh.

Darnaway adhered to the opinion that he might be useful. He could fetch and carry; there were always things to be done in illness: doctor's stuff to fetch, commissions to execute. Mary would want a messenger to whom she could explain things in her own tongue. Perhaps he was biassed in his decision by the fact that Frau von Glümer was also returning to Munich in a few days to disperse the Muses to their various homes, and settle for the winter; but perhaps not. Mary had already had occasion to test his loyalty as a friend.

Tosh understood that remonstrance was useless, and looked on darkly while Darnaway hunted about the sitting-room for his own possessions: books and pipes and all the odds and ends that an idle man accumulates in the course of the summer.

He had more properties than Tosh, who was no reader, for there were the paints, the glue-pots, the card-board and gilt paper out of which he had manipulated treasures for the nine, the archæological magazines borrowed from the priest, and the American walnut-wood box he was chip-carving for Hēla—not to speak of the camera with which he had tortured and caricatured his friends. The room looked sud-

denly empty when he had carried various armloads to his own quarters and flung them into that heap which is an essential preliminary to a man's packing. There were dark squares upon the table from which the books had been lifted—oases of cleanliness round which the dust rioted. It looked horribly comfortless. Tosh lifted an angry boot and kicked the iron stove for giving no promise of companionship. A stove is like a reticent man out of whom you get no response—a bad comrade for the evening pipe. To sit alone by that grim iron cylinder was no cheerful prospect.

For all that, he saw no reason—no earthly reason—why he should not stay behind. Hang the proprieties! He would persuade Lilith to marry him, and the malevolence of Mrs. Grundy would be silenced.

He had gone over in his mind a hundred times the arguments he would use when he had a chance; but fortune did not favour him. Then he decided that the circumstances were desperate enough to justify him in breaking his promise and making his own opportunity.

He had been restlessly in and out all day, visiting each of the haunts he knew her to care for: the terrace, of course, and the little Museum, with the dilapidated plaster casts of Rome's Emperors, where, for the sake of the damp coolness, they had sometimes had tea in the burning days of summer, and the dell behind the torture chamber where they had found the wild strawberries—he and she together—and eaten them in greedy solitude; but on each occasion he had drawn a blank covert.

Then, with a bold defiance of criticism from the slut of a maid who was making dabs with a wet cloth tied to the end of a broom at the incrustated dirt upon the stair, he sat him down upon the ledge of the window that commanded the entrance to Lilith's rooms. The maid in her astonishment upset her pail, and the water ran down in a stream past his feet, but he only drew them up mechanically and never turned his head.

Six yellow leaves—he counted them—sailed down with infinite gentleness from the chestnut beside the well: twenty swallows huddled and twittered on the ridge of the Museum roof, their beaks to that Land of Promise, the South. Then the door opened, and Lilith came out.

She wore a hat and jacket, and carried the little basket she had always taken when they went in search of flowers; but she hesitated, the door still open behind her, and looked with a vague sort of appeal all round her. Where—east, west, north or south—was *her* Land of Promise?

He did not understand—how should he?—but he felt the pathos, and it smote him keenly. She had grown to look fragile, of late, her beauty more ethereal, with suggestions and capacities never before perceived. Tosh, indeed, could not see beyond the pallor, the dark circles under her beautiful eyes; but a subdued patience, a nerveless gentleness in her manner, moved him sometimes to a white heat of anger at the barriers that reared themselves against his hot desire to cherish and comfort her.



She was ill, he was sure she was ill. That beast of a German woman did not look after her. Perhaps—appalling thought—she did not get enough to eat!

Almost before she had time to move, he had flung himself down the stair and was out and had intercepted her by the Madonna's well. She looked startled and made as though she would fly, but he entreated her with a look.

"I want to talk to you."

"Yes?"

"Darnaway's going away, but I'm not."

She looked surprised, and he explained, repeating a little more doggedly, as if to anticipate objection, "I'm going to stay."

She cast a quick, apprehensive look up at the house.

"He's getting ready now. He's swearing over his packing. He'll put in a good hour at it," he said, with a comfortable conviction that they were alone and safe from interruption.

They were alone except for Mops, who didn't count. Mops snuffed delicately at the hem of Lilith's serge, and, deriving no encouragement to make advances, retired upon crooked legs to Tosh, who stooped to pick him up by the scruff of the neck. It gave him a sort of courage to feel Mops' warm skin wrinkling under his hands, and to be licked by Mops' grateful tongue, and he needed all his courage, for Lilith was saying:

"No, please, you are going, too."

"Then you'll come with us—to Mary?"

"No, not yet—perhaps later."

"But you can't be left alone!"

"I was alone before you came," she smiled faintly.

"But it's different now. The weather is breaking. They say it will be an unusually early autumn. There's lots of snow on the mountains already."

"I don't mind the weather," she said, but she quailed a little. She was not so wholly miserable but that she shrank from the added burden of bodily discomfort. She had always hated cold.

He saw his advantage and pressed it home.

"You'd better let me stay," he urged. "I won't bother you, I give you my word of honour, but I can see that these German beasts look after you properly. They don't understand me any more than I understand them, but I've rubbed it into them that I mean to get my own way."

He perceived that the line of argument he was using was not the one he had so often rehearsed, but if he could only win her consent to his remaining, the other would keep. He would have his chance then. "If we had been strangers," he convinced himself, "the world would have had to shut its mouth if we had chanced to occupy rooms in the same old barrack to the end of creation. Because we happen to know each other—where's the difference?"

But the conventional aspect of the matter did not touch her. She had not even considered it. Her mind was full of something else, bracing itself for a costly effort.

"I like my own way too, Tosh."

"But it isn't a good way, Lilith."

"I want you to go," she repeated, but more urgently.

"For my sake, I think you will."

"Do you mind so much what people say? For myself, I don't care a hang. I think it's all rot. I just shove out busybodies and tattlers, and all that lot, and you—as a widow"—in his desperation Tosh used an argument he hated, for he kept the thought of the late Mr. Shore as far in the back settlements of his imagination as was possible—"nobody could breathe a word."

It will show how far Lilith had travelled that this use of her pet phrase gave her almost a little shock. That picture of hapless grace and innocence and misfortune that had been so comforting had faded before the real image, nakedly visible at last.

"I—I wasn't thinking of that," she faltered, and indeed the thought of him as a lover had been washed from her mind by an overwhelming wave of emotion. "I wished to be alone, because I want time to think. Because—there is something I must say——"

"To think what you'll say to me? Oh, my dear, that need take no thinking if it's the right answer!" Such an eager hope shone through his eyes that she suddenly remembered and was sorry.

"No, not that—not what you mean."

"Don't say you're making up your mind to throw me over, Lilith"—the radiance died out of his face and left it suddenly grey—"I said I wouldn't bother you, but if it's that——"

"Oh, Tosh," she said mournfully, "don't make it more hard! When you hear what I have to tell you, you will not want to marry me. You will be sorry you ever knew me, ever grew to like me——"

"I can't be that," he said vehemently. "You might say what you choose—you might tell me you had committed every sin in the calendar, and it would make no difference. You would still be you—the woman I love. That's enough for me. So what's the good of trying to make yourself out different? Don't you see, it would be just wasted words——"

"You are very good," she said faintly. His loyalty made that wound in her heart, of which he knew nothing, smart afresh.

"Good?" he laughed, but his face had not regained its colour—"to want the only thing that will make me happy?"

She wrenched her thoughts back from her own pre-occupation to his. It was so difficult to think that Tosh was suffering too. He looked so big and strong, and he had everything else—everything but the one thing she had no longer any impulse to give him.

"I don't want you to think me better than I am," she said. "You know nothing about me."

"I know enough. I know all I want, and if I didn't—you are Mary's friend."

"Oh, yes!" she said with dreary bitterness. "It is not that. I am quite respectable. Fraü von Glümer took good care to ascertain that before she left her card on me. I haven't broken any of those

commandments that put a woman outside the pale, as you seem to think——”

“I think! Good God, how you torture me, Lilith!”

“Oh, it would be very natural for you to think it! But—there may be worse sins than that. If I were to show you my real self, you would be the first to condemn me.”

“Try me!” he said with proud assurance.

“Yes,” she said, feeling that there was no other way to be done with him; to escape. “I will put you to the proof. Someday I will tell you my story and you shall judge for yourself. I suppose I ought to tell it you now, having said so much, but—I am so tired.”

“No, no,” he said, instantly moved. “I’m a brute to keep you standing. Mustn’t stand. You need rest; go in and lie down.”

“It isn’t—exactly pleasant—to destroy another person’s belief in you, is it?” she said, smiling at him with pale lips. “And that’s what I’m going to do. It’s like—putting a knife to your heart. And—I’ve always been a coward. So if you would go away and give me a little time—to get the knife ready? Yes, to-day, please, and I’ll send for you—I promise.”

“Not for that,” he stammered—“if it’s that, I can’t come. Don’t you see—it would be the knife for me too—and it wouldn’t be any good, for I would go on caring all the same. But if I can help you—if you want a chap to run errands” (here was he offering to do the very thing for which he had scouted Darnaway), “or—to bully that fool of a woman——”

"Yes, you can help me, and I will send for you very soon."

"God bless you for that!" he said huskily, taking her cold hand for a moment in his own. He stepped aside to let her pass, but looked after her with hungry eyes.

When, an hour later, Darnaway went to her door to make his formal visit of farewell, he got no response to his knocking, and meeting the porter's wife as he was returning to his rooms he left his card and message with her.

At three o'clock, when the carriage drew up at the end of the rickety drawbridge, Tosh heaved a port-manteau, which bulged with congested clothing, on to the box, and took his seat beside Darnaway in a silence wrapped in gloom. Half his shirts and almost all his socks were at the wash, but what did it matter—what did anything matter if Lilith finally rejected him?

Darnaway made no comment on his sudden change of mind, and they departed like mutes, the porter and the landlord speeding the funeral procession.

Lilith, trembling in the little Museum, under the cold stare of Augustus, Severus and Nero, none the less withering because of broken noses, heard the wheels go round.

They were carrying a great deal out of her life: the love that she coveted and the love that she did not value. For the first time she was experiencing the bitter irony of life which gives us a stone when we ask for bread.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE ISAR CLAIMS ITS TRIBUTE

THE peasant, who knows the face of the weather as he knows the face of his own mother, was right. Winter thrust Autumn aside and leapt upon the land at one stride. The snow fell thick upon the mountains till against the lowering sky they stood out like marble, hard and shadowless.

Lilith drew as close to the ungenial warmth of the black stove as she could and suffered in apathetic misery, incapable alike of reflection or of action. It was part of the unkindness of things that the sunshine—which she loved like a cat—should disappear with every gleam or glow which made life tolerable. The woman who served her looked at her with a kind of good-humoured scorn which passed Lilith wholly by.

“No more sun to warm in,” she announced, perhaps with an idea of forcing some show of interest out of the dejected figure, chin sunk on breast, huddled in shawls; but Lilith did not listen. “No more sun, but rain, rain, rain, and then, *mein Gott!* but there will be a rising of the river, but immense, stupendous!” her voice had an edge of exultation. Schwar-



zenwald stood high above any possible flood ; it was those others, down yonder—those fools and rivals of the “ White Swan ”—who would suffer. “ Ai ! but it would be a thing to make the blind see ! ”

Not even her laugh roused Lilith. The floods and rains had already beaten upon her house of life and laid it low.

But again the peasant woman was right. The dead silence of Nature in which the snow had fallen was broken that same night, and through every wind gap of the foot hills and down every aisle of black forest came a restless moaning. It increased towards nightfall till the moaning became a shriek, the rage and baffled spite of some wounded thing that bites the dust, and, seeming to die, wakes with gathered strength to new fury.

Towards morning the black banners of cloud, flung riven and tattered across the firmament, massed themselves together : the wind was conquered at last and the rain fell. How it fell ! Unbrokenly, unceasingly, from the grey of a dawn that scarcely lightened till it grew again into the grey of dusk.

Lilith lay upon her bed and heard it beat against her casement with a steady, persistent force that never wavered. It was like the rattle of musketry, as if the Castle—which had already suffered so many—was standing yet another siege from an enemy who would not be denied. Presently she saw a sinuous line creep stealthily in at some cranny and, trickling down, spread till it became a little pool in the hollow of the floor. She dragged herself listlessly

up and looked out. Through the blurred pane she saw a world of desolation : the trees, blown bare, bent aslant, the land cowering under the pitiless scourge of the heavens. The moat, which all the summer had been starred with daisies, was laden now with sullen water in which the last yellow leaves of the apple trees had found their burial. From an opposite window she could see the river. Gone was all its grace of song and dance, its emerald hues and yellow sands merged in one ochre-coloured flood, turbid, hideous, fleeing under the revengeful sky like a thing pursued by fiends. The roar came up to her as it went on its mad way, ever widening its borders with a fierce, destructive clutch upon bank and tree.

Lilith left the window shuddering. She was not conscious how she passed the two succeeding days in which the skies let out their store : whether she ate or drank, or undressed to sleep. It was a long misery of endurance in which physical and mental wretchedness were so blended that they made but one intolerable pain.

On the third day the woman from the inn came only once. The peasants were stricken with fear now too—fear of Nature in a mood uncomprehended by them. With the fatalism of their class, they let the river take its toll of the harvest and the woods, staying their hands to save, and climbed from the valleys to the church, wearing their knees in supplication to the saints.

And the saints seemingly heard, for on the fourth morning the rain had left off. The earth was a marsh,

but it wavered back to the old allegiance with a sickly smile for the sun-gleam unseen so long.

Lilith roused herself and dressed, and for the first time for these many days entered her little sitting-room : in the silence of the rain, the roar of the river seemed to fill it.

Across the sodden and flooded courtyard she saw the priest picking his way, a long, lanky black figure with the step of a peasant used to ridged lands. She had laughed at him—Mary having insisted on inviting him to coffee—because he kept dropping the little Apostle spoon out of his saucer, and suffered an anguish of shyness each time in groping for it ; but she was very glad to see him now. She wished she could understand him, that she might open the case-ment and bid him come and talk to her. Suddenly he looked up, and grasping his soft hat by the middle lifted it with awkward courtesy. He had come to see the *Haûsmeister*, who lived by the gate, and the sound of their voices reached her where she sat. It seemed to heighten the immense sense of loneliness in which she felt herself wrapped.

Then it occurred to her that the priest might wonder—perhaps with a little pity—to see her still there and alone, as the rough servant had wondered, she knew, with contempt. There was some reason for her isolation—something she had resolved to do—to plan? Ah, yes! she recalled it all now ; her reason for refusing to return to Munich, or to let Tosh remain behind. The time had come when she must look things in the face and make up her mind

what to do. She could not stay here always ; it was winter already ; what must it be when real winter came ? Her mind shuddered away from the contemplation of Nature in her blind passions. She must go away—somewhere. Imagination took no grip of the future, left it unguessed, for in the foreground the thing that waited for her to do was to make confession to Tosh.

Slowly and out of a great chaos of feeling this one resolve had surged up. She would tell him, not so much because he loved her—though that made the knowledge his due—as because she loved Darnaway, and the love that she gave him must be of the best. That is what all real love exacts, that it gives of its highest, even without reward. It was her atonement to him.

“I will give Tosh back to him,” ran her thought, “and perhaps—when I am quite away, he will think less ill of me.”

A sudden desire to do it and be done with it cried out in her. She had suffered so much. Perhaps after this last humiliation she would grow numb to the pain as people do in long-protracted illness, so that in the end they do not dread even the final pang of dissolution. She got up before her feet could begin to tremble and refuse to carry her and went to her bedroom to fetch paper and pen, to write to Tosh and bid him come. The dainty satin blotter with her initials in Japanese gold and the scented pink note-paper seemed to belong to another self, another woman than this pale, distraught creature in whose eyes dwelt fear and shame.

She carried the blotter to the next room, and there stood Tosh himself.

"I'm afraid I didn't knock loud enough," he said, noticing her nervous start and forgetting any other greeting. "The river is making such a confounded row."

At sight of him, her resolution began to ooze out of her. She looked at him frightenedly. His voice was different. He was haggard, though he smiled, and his clear, healthy colour was replaced by a grey pallor. He could not hide that he had suffered.

"I know you didn't send for me," he said humbly, noticing her silence, "but Mary made me come. She's been anxious about you and she wants you. Mrs. Dewar isn't so well—bronchitis, I think—or Mary would have come herself. But she said I needn't come back alive unless I brought you."

His cheerfulness was a poor sham, but she felt again the sense of protection and strength he always gave her. Against his splendid vitality the elements contended in vain, though the dripping trees had showered their moisture on him and his boots were cased in clay. He was ready to stand between her and every blast.

"It has been dreadful," she shuddered.

"Yes, they say there hasn't been such a flood since the beginning of the century. I was in a funk myself about you, but when I saw your light every night in the window I knew you'd be all right."

"You came—every night?"

"You didn't suppose I was going to leave you

with nobody to look after you but those brutes of foreigners? I've been stopping at Giezelgastein's. That's half way, you know, and every day I walked into Munich to see—if there was a note."

"I was going to write—now." She looked down at the blotter in her hand. "I think if I had known you were so near, I must have sent for you."

"Then you'll come now?" a little eagerness and hope crept back to his face.

"Where?" she asked, looking at him apprehensively, shrinking from the thought of seeing Darnaway.

"To Mary's; to her rooms. Darnaway's staying at the 'Monarch.' Mary wants you to help her to nurse Mrs. Dewar. She's got a bed for you, and my orders are to bring you straight. You're not even to stop to pack."

"To Mary's? Yes, I'll go." She looked round the room like a frightened child. Mary knew, and Mary would hide her. "Oh, I couldn't stay here now—alone——"

Tosh wrestled with his voice and recovered its control.

"You can't and you mustn't," he said very gently. "I knew you couldn't stand it. But we'll have to go by the ferry. There has been a big landslip, and the road on this side is impassable, or I'd have brought a carriage. You won't be afraid? The river is running awfully fast, and rising every hour, but the man thinks he can cross once more if we're quick—I came that way just now."

She roused herself, the fear to be left behind stronger now than the dread of going.

"I'll be very quick," she said, and left him to put a few things together.

Tosh waited by the window and drearily traced a raindrop in its journey down the pane.

"If she will only not tell me, though it won't make any difference," he said as the drop was arrested by the sill: "it won't make *me* stand still."

That was what he had been saying the whole week long, and yet, for all his loyalty and all his love, this unknown thing was stronger than his will. It would not be thrust out of his mind. He barred the door on it, and it came in by some unseen crack. He buried it deep and it rose again.

She came back in a very few minutes, dressed, and with a little bag in her hand which he took from her.

"Have you got strong boots?" he asked. "It's like a burn most of the way," and it was he, not she, who remembered to lock the door and take the key. He advised her, with his provincial distrust of "foreigners," to take her valuables with her.

"I haven't any," she said, pale to the lips. "I gave them—Mary has them. There's nothing I care about."

"Come along, then."

At the bottom of the stair he stopped.

"I'll have to carry you. I hope you don't mind?"

She hesitated, and, seeing that the yard was covered some inches deep, yielded.

He took her in his arms and picked his way across



the flooded enclosure and over the rickety draw-bridge, careful not to splash. He held her strongly, yet gently, but the sledge-hammer at his heart made his breath come in gasps.

"I'm too heavy," she said with self-reproach as he released her, seeing how pale he was ; but he gave a curt, quick "No," fighting with the insane emotion that ran through his veins at the feeling of her soft helplessness pressed against him, crushing down a wild impulse to strain her close and never let her go.

The water had made a channel for itself of the wood path, tearing a deep rut in it, and walking was difficult ; but she declined his further help. They made slow progress, and, as neither of them spoke, the silence between them seemed to grow immense, till it filled all space.

He was fighting for something—anything to say, so that she might not think he was waiting for that thing she had to tell ; but something struck him dumb.

She was not fighting, but fencing. She had to tear down her own honour and offer it to him to trample under foot. That was her penance. Only not yet.

*"I will tell him when we come to the big oak."*

Suddenly he made his stiff tongue move. What it said mattered very little, since neither of them was listening, but he talked fast and did not wait for any answer.

At the big oak between whose ridged roots the water lay in pools they met a man. He worked in the village, and they knew him by sight, and to nod

to friendly on ordinary occasions, but now both stared at him with blank unrecognition.

He gave them a *Grüss Gott*, and, full of the excitement of disaster, poured out a long and unintelligible communication. Tosh mechanically muttered something by way of rejoinder and they passed on. The big oak was left behind, and she had not spoken.

*"I will tell him when we get to the top of the bank, after he has hailed the ferryman."*

But out of the bank sapped by the flood a huge, semi-circular bite had been eaten ; rocks, trees, earth, swallowed up by the insatiable river grown drunk and mad upon the melted snows of the mountains. The world down here wore a new face, as if some Titan geographer had been at play with its boundaries, shifting them with mocking caprice. The opposite bank was changed beyond recognition, the havoc complete ; great wounds there were, rent in its sides, where between the uprooted trees you could see the geological formation so long and so carefully hidden under Nature's green coat ; the pines lay prone, like soldiers after a battle, and every now and then the river would heave and lick one long, helpless trunk with the sweep of a wave to itself, tossing and turning and playing with it as some beast of prey with its victim. Yes, it was like a beast of prey, this great and terrible Isar, swollen to twice its natural breadth and height, forging on in its mad, proud fury. The roar of it stunned her, and she clung closely to Tosh.

"It will take me too," the old fear rose : "it will take me too !"

He stood on the edge of the rent and crumbling bank, one hand clasping hers firmly, and looked about him anxiously, with keen eyes, quick for every sign. It was possible to lift her down the scaur from which the path had been riven, for he had stopped to hollow rough steps in it on his way up, breaking away the sodden clay with his stick, and stamping it into some sort of cohesion with his thick boots. He could do it. There was a foot's breadth of solid ground down there, and the platform still stood. It was built on piles that were supposed to lift it high above danger at any season, and though the dozen steps that led down to the water's ordinary level were all submerged, the boarded surface glimmered whitely under the wash. There was an inch of water over it which had not been there when he ascended, but it seemed safe.

With difficulty he crept and felt his way down the bank alone, then returned and, half lifting, half carrying her, got her safely to the bottom. He tried the platform himself first, and finding that it did not rock beneath him, he dragged a fallen sapling on to it.

"Stand on this," he said, "and you won't get your feet wet." He helped her, as if she were a child, lifting her skirt above the water and directing her to hold it with one nerveless hand while his own closed fast about the other. "Lean your weight on me and you'll feel quite steady. So——"

She obeyed mutely. Her mind seemed to whirl with this awful, whirling water dealing out woe and destruction. One used to go down many steps—

steep steps to the boat ; they were all lost now under the turbid flood, and Tosh's boots were covered, too. She watched the waves race past with a terrified fascination. He stood steady as a rock, but if the river should prove the stronger—if it should sweep them both away—it was carrying tribute with it out yonder, where the current thundered. The fragments of a house stolen from some higher reach flew by, and then some dark, resistless object that might be horse or cow ; then a great, clean-shaven log filched from the wood-cutters, helping the mad dance of death.

Tosh hollowed his hands and gave a great shout—how could he make himself heard above that black din? The ferryman's cottage was intact, but the pocket-handkerchief of meadow in front of it, and the scrap of enclosed garden that had looked like nothing so much as a grave, were gone. Another shout, and yet another, and then the man by chance, perhaps, came to his door. He stood there in no haste to issue forth, knowing, doubtless, that they haled him on a useless errand. What had been possible two hours before was impossible now, and they were fools not to know it.

Presently he stepped out. They saw him advance, then lost him behind the bruised and battered foliage ; a minute or two more and he would emerge again.

"He's coming," said Tosh, and in his relief his hand closed and tightened over hers.

She felt the pressure, and it recalled her to herself.

"Tosh!" there was an agony of appeal in the word.

Every vestige of colour had left her face: his was ashen; in the eyes of both there was an unsleeping terror. The mad career of the river, the sinister sky, the chaos all about them were swept clean away in the whirl of their own emotions. What was Nature's tragedy to their human woe? Tosh was suffering that intolerable wrench at the heart that is surely the foretaste of death; his shaking lips would not do his bidding. He wanted them to say "Hush," and they would not say it. She caught his meaning in the motion of his arm and shook her head faintly. Her white face was convulsed, and her words came dropping one by one like flakes of fire on his heart.

"I must tell you. Mr. Darnaway would never tell you——"

He felt the fire in his veins now, and his mouth shut tight over his teeth. His grasp of her wrist must have made her cry out if she had been capable of feeling physical pain.

"I had a little child, a girl, and that night—upon the wreck——"

No, they never saw it, the great log that the water carried like a bludgeon, as if there were murder in its heart—never saw the wild gesticulations, never heard the warning cries of the ferryman on the other shore shouting himself hoarse, trying to tell them that there was danger, great danger: that he could not take his boat out over that seething hell of water, to be cracked like an egg-shell.

Were they mad that they did not see that the river was rising with every pulse beat? Were they mad that they stood there—defying it? The river took his voice with it in wild mockery, and the log came swaying and whirling on. A moment where the waters divide, it swithered, then took the inner current under the bank and, blundering on, flung its great, inert force upon the landing stage.

A crack, a wrench which swallowed up Lilith's piercing scream, a sudden loosening of the very foundations of life, as it seemed, when she and Tosh were tossed apart and all but a fragment of the stage, left clinging to its support, went where the tree went, tossed up, sucked under, gone like a leaf that the wind takes.

Lilith, gasping, shuddering, screamed again hoarsely. She was wet, battered, bruised, dazed, stricken to her very soul with terror as she clung with hands and knees to the ragged edge of timber on which she was stranded. Tosh was close beside her, but how still he was! She recalled the look on his face before that sudden rending blow, and then—no more. He had been flung down in the sudden ruin and lay nearer the bank, his head and chest supported on his bent arms. She babbled something with shrill lips and got no answer. Then she realised that he was stunned by some part of the falling wreckage and was insensible. Perhaps—he—was dead. It needed but that to put the coping stone on her terror.

Shaking like a leaf, she spared a hand to push the



yellow hair from his half-turned face. His eyes were shut, his cheek pallid, but the skin she touched with her clammy hand was warm. He lived : he might be saved : they might both be saved if help came in time. She tore off a little shawl she had wrapped round her throat and, making a ball of it, thrust it under his head to lift it still further from the encroaching water. The dire peril, the strenuous need to live, to avert death, was clearing her thoughts.

The wrecked landing-stage was now a mere island in the middle of a boiling cauldron ; by a miracle alone it still existed ; soon, very soon, it must yield to the fury of the tide : already the water ran in a broadening stream between it and the shore. She measured the distance with her eye. If she could pass Tosh and leap it ? There was scarce room to turn upon the groaning timbers, there was none to give an impetus to that dreadful jump ; but despair might help her. Once upon the bank, no obstacle would stay her flying feet.

Suddenly she saw that Tosh was slipping back into the water. The current was sucking him under. To go from him would be to leave him to certain death. Poor Lilith ! her soul reared itself in that moment to great heights. Without another thought of her own safety she released her other hand and clutched hold of him. She held him convulsively, with the strength of despair. With a mighty effort she put forth all her force and tried to drag him back, but she might as easily have stopped the river. In his unconsciousness he was a dead weight, and as he



slipped and slipped, inch by inch, he drew her over too.

She was on her knees now, her feet wholly in the water. Oh, the deathly cold of it, like ice upon the very heart! But she did not lose her desperate clutch. She forgot herself, she was fighting the river, fighting for Tosh's life. But the river was gaining. She was dragged down close against him now, her right elbow immersed.

Would God not listen? Had she been too wicked?

The plank under her shivered and swayed, as if it knew that it must yield. That man they met by the oak! She screamed again. A whole lifetime of anguish was in those few seconds that seemed like years, and Tosh, who would have given his world to save her the least of suffering, never knew. Then her arms grew numb with the terrible strain on them, and a mist began to float before her eyes and make things dim, though she wrestled with it and held on. The river had got into her brain; it was singing there. What a noise it made—like the noise of Niagara. Her hands did not seem to belong to her. How strange it was! She opened her closing eyes to look, and wondered to see that blood was dropping from one of them on to Tosh's hair. Blood? How did it come there? She had always hated the sight of blood.

What was that that cracked under her? That wave touched her face; the cold revived her.

"Tosh," she whispered. "Tosh, are you awake?"

It was the river that answered, but she could not understand what it said. But it understood—it was laughing. “He isn’t awake; he will never awake, and you will sleep too when you come to my arms. Your strength is going—going; you cannot fight against me. I take what I choose, and what I choose I keep.”

Suddenly above the heave of tumultuous waters rose a man’s hoarse shout. Her failing senses heard it, and with a last supreme effort she pulled herself together.

A thud of wooden-shod feet and the villager they had met by the oak flung himself down the rent bank, and, lying prone, stretched out cautious hands as he wriggled nearer. Attracted by the wild gesticulations of the ferryman on the further side he had turned and followed the strangers. He wasted no breath in words as he crawled forwards, pushing before him a stranded timber.

She knew even then, though the dimness was coming back to her eyes, that he would understand her—there is only one language for the great crises of life.

“Him first!” she gasped. “He is insensible.”

Tosh was leaving her. Tosh, who had said he would never go. He was pulling away from her, wrenching himself free from the grasp of her hands; but it was not the Isar that was taking him. It was taking her instead. Somebody was calling; there were many voices, but they were very far away and low and faint—and the river would not let her wait——

Ah, the deadly chill! the blackness of deep night, the suffocating pressure, the fight for breath with that sword piercing her! Was this the cruel clutch of Death?

No, surely it was Life—the very beginnings of Life. The river crooned now, very gently, a lullaby she had heard long, long ago. And it cradled her softly—so softly.

The clock of time was set back and she was a child—a little child once more—or—was it Lilla, this pale little one with the grave eyes? “See, my arms are stretched out. We will go through this new world together, hand in hand—but first to rest, we two, on this soft breast, a long, long sleep. Infinite calm—infinite peace—and then——”

## CHAPTER XXVII

### MARY HAS A VISITOR

WHEN Mrs. Dewar fell ill, Mary hastened to move into apartments where she could rejoice in the luxury of a private sitting-room. There Darnaway found her on the day Tosh went to Schwarzenwald. He had already used a good many arguments to induce her to go out with him to see the river, at which all Munich was gazing with a helpless sense that if it chose it might wash them into the unknown; but Mary refused to leave her patient.

"But it's a clear duty. The flood is magnificent."

"I have seen a flood before. I have even seen a Highland spate!"

"Pooh! all the burns in Scotland wouldn't contribute a teacupful to the immense volume of water. Have you realised that two bridges are gone and another threatened?"

"I think I'm equal to imagining so much."

"You'll regret it as a lost reminiscence—a *wilfully* lost reminiscence—when you're an anecdotal old lady!"

"Then posterity will be spared one yawn; anecdotal old ladies are terrible bores."

"Come, to please me."

"I'd rather stay at home to please myself" (which was not true, though it served her end). "Haven't you discovered that a passion for my own way is the last infirmity of my noble mind?"

"I call it sheer conceit and vanity. Mrs. Dewar doesn't want you all day long."

"There is no such thing as conceit. According to Herbert Spencer, what we miscall vanity is merely 'a sense of efficiency.' What a comfortable thing it is to be a philosopher! As for Granny, I wouldn't take her word for it if she assured me to my face that she wanted to be alone."

"I should, I know, if I were she."

"Thank you; you would certainly be indulged! I have Dr. Johnson's authority for it that 'every man is a rascal when he is sick'—a remark drawn no doubt from a wide observation of male human nature."

"And every woman an angel when she ministers to him! Please don't hurl any more quotations at my head, or I'll be compelled to compose my remarks with the help of a dictionary of scraps of useless knowledge before I leave home."

"I wish you would," she smiled; "it would be a nice calming occupation, and you wouldn't come bothering me just when I had wound myself up to do my duty in that estate of life to which Germany has reduced me. If you think the 'ministering angel' business is a sinecure in the Fatherland you are mistaken. It's a case of do everything yourself if you want anything done at all."

"A reason the more why you should come out and get a little fresh air to help you along."

She was about to answer with gay mockery that he was refreshment enough, when a loud, hard knock at the door, suggesting the application of a well-seasoned knuckle, caused them both to turn.

"*Herein*," said Mary, and *herein* came a tousled Mädchen who announced that an *Englische Dame*, who had travelled far, wished to know "if the *gnädiges Fräulein* was *zu sprechen*."

"I am certainly to be spoken to," said Mary, with a glance of malice at Darnaway; "witness my meek-under rebuke for the last half hour. It can't be Lilith; it is much too soon to expect her. Who can it be?"

She fell to wondering after the fatuous fashion of people who examine an envelope from a strange correspondent back and front, postmark and stamp, instead of adopting the obvious expedient of opening it.

"Whoever she be, this not impossible she, she has put a final extinguisher on my hopes. Wouldn't it be simpler to ask her up? I'm off."

"Of course I'm going to have her up!" said Mary, giving the order to the maid. "She excites my curiosity and interests me far more than your broken bridges. Come again soon."

"I don't feel encouraged," he said, smiling. "You are as quenching as the Isar."

"I don't 'go on for ever' like some people!" she retorted as they shook hands.

He was gone before the stranger had toiled up the two long flights. She came slowly, and Mary sat expectantly facing the open door. When at length she became framed within it, Mary's brain took an instantaneous photographic impression which helped her at once to class her visitor.

She was what one calls no longer very young, which may be truthfully said of many whose sum of years is not great. She was tall and she stooped, with a hollowed chest and a timidly advanced chin; she wore a jacket whose sleeves treasonably denounced it. Skimpy sleeves, when all the world was giving its elbows a balloon to dwell in, had the effect of placing the wearer in another century.

Mary rose as the stranger timidly advanced. The face was quite unknown to her, but in spite of sleeves and a damaging bow that squarely tied that forward-poking chin, she was a lady. Of that Mary was certain.

"I think you are Miss Skelton?" The voice was very diffident, soft, and slow. "I took the liberty—my name is Shore—Jane Shore."

A light flashed into Mary's dark eyes; she put out an impulsive hand.

"You are Lilith's sister-in-law?" she said. "Of course, of course! I have heard of you often. Do sit down. Try this low seat." She became fluent to set her guest at ease.

But Janey could not command her confidence all at once. The effort was too great. She looked at Mary helplessly.



"I came to ask you where and how I should find Lilith. I thought—I hoped you would help me. She spoke of you in her letter. She said—you—were—her friend."

"That is true."

Janey's anxious blue eyes searched Mary's face. She wanted something more, some further assurance, and Mary's quick wit leapt to the fact. She leaned forward.

"I think I have a right to that name," she said, "since she has given me her confidence. We were fellow-passengers on board the *St. George*, and that made—a bond—when we met here by chance this summer." (A bond, indeed! Had she not worn fetters for Lilith's sake?) "You have come to see her? You have come to the right place, for she will be here very soon—in an hour or two. She has been staying out at Schwarzenwald—the village from which she wrote to you, but she is returning to Munich to-day."

Janey shrank back, her colour coming and going. Mary was altogether at a loss to account for this agitation. Was she afraid to meet Lilith? Bad news? But that dreadful bow was green and the condemned jacket brown; it could not be a death she had come to announce. How did she survive the terrors of the journey, and what was her motive in coming? Not pleasure, seemingly. Money difficulties? But Lilith was the last person to apply to in that strait!

While her mind was at work her voice, acting on

its own account, was discoursing. It gushed forth platitudes upon that little innocent bit of travel; it asked questions which were never meant to be answered. Mary was rich in the small change of talk, and knew when to spend it lavishly.

Presently Janey drew her deserting forces together and vouchsafed a halting explanation, but she took hold of it at the wrong end.

"I must tell you how I come to be here. When my father and I heard, we agreed that I ought to go to Lilith, rather than that he should write. We thought a letter might not seem so kind as one wanted to make it; it is so difficult to write—all that is in one's heart. A friend lent me the money—a rich friend, who is very good to me." She brightened momentarily. "She has travelled a great deal, and she took so much trouble to make things easy; she wrote down all the trains and places, and some little phrases too—for I am no linguist—and other people—strangers, on the way, were kind. It wasn't so difficult. I brought very little luggage—only a bag."

She looked down at her side with a sudden distressed sense that her jealous guardianship of that possession—the vicar's own rose-strewed carpet-bag—had been culpably relaxed. "I think—I am afraid I must have left it downstairs," she stammered.

"It is quite safe," said Mary soothingly. "We are living here, my companion and I, and we know the people. They are absolutely honest."

"Oh, thank you," said Janey, with a breath of relief. "I am a very stupid traveller," she smiled faintly.

"My father would have been much wiser, but he is old and not strong. I was afraid for him to come."

"You will be among friends here." The puzzle continued unsolved, but Mary was sorry for her visitor, whose long back declined the cushion it seemed to need so badly, whose long nose was suffused with the pink of suppressed tears. "You must let us do what we can to help you."

"That was why I ventured to come first to you. We thought perhaps if Lilith were—inclined to doubt us, as she might be, seeing how little we know of each other, you, whom she trusts, would help her to understand—you would persuade her. It is so much to my father and me that she should believe us."

Mary felt her wits going.

"Do you know," she said, grasping the situation with both hands, "I'm afraid you're presupposing some knowledge on my part that I don't possess. Is there any specially urgent reason—beyond the pleasure of seeing her—why you should come to Lilith now?"

"Only to tell her it will make no difference, our knowing," said Janey, bewildered in her turn.

"Your knowing—*what?*"

"About—little Lilla's death."

Mary felt a shock pass through her. Time had in part worn away the first deep impression of the child's tragic end, time and the love and the pity in which she was at last able to wrap the mother; but her own quickened sympathy made her realise vividly

what it must have meant to this feeble, gentle creature when the knowledge burst upon her in all its naked hideousness.

"I thought—I hoped Lilith had told you now,"—she said in a low voice. "I know she did not at first."

Janey shook her head. Her lips trembled, and the ready tears were in her eyes now.

"I am so sorry." Mary put out a hand and laid it firmly on Janey's shaking one.

"We did not know—till the summer. A person named Rollo told us. He said he was on board that night. He *was* on board?" Janey's eyes implored a denial.

Mary nodded, not trusting herself to speak.

"He came in August to visit our squire—for the shooting. My father was introduced one day to him in the village, and then he came to the vicarage. He spoke about it, about everything. I dare say, no doubt, he believed that we knew——"

"I daresay!" echoed Mary, with concentrated scorn.

"If we had been able to disbelieve him, if even yet it should be all a mistake——" Again there was that piteous entreaty in the anxious eyes.

For all answer Mary took her other hand, but her eyes spoke too in their sorrowful compassion.

Janey trembled and sighed. "At first, of course, it was dreadful. My father was quite bowed down; but soon we came to see—we came, in part, to understand. And oh——" love gave this feeble pleader force and fire—"you must not blame her, not harshly, because she did not tell us herself. We led her

wrong by taking it for granted from the first minute that the newspaper account, which said the little girl had died on the boat, was correct. We live quite out of the world and hear little. And then, afterwards, it must have been almost impossible for her to set the mistake right. Think what it must have cost her! And she thought of sparing my father, too, I am sure. Sometimes I think if I had been wiser, or cleverer, or perhaps more patient—she would have confided in me, but I was vexed with her for going away so abruptly and refusing to meet papa's old friend, Bishop Graham."

"The Bishop is a good man, not like that unspeakable cur, Rollo. Don't be shocked, but there is no other word for him."

Janey did look shocked, nevertheless. Her contempt had satisfied itself with calling the honourable Roderick a "person."

"It would have been easier for papa if he could have seen and talked with the Bishop, but he did not come, he was ill. And Mr. Rollo——"

"Oh, I know, I know! He didn't spare the dark shades. Let us leave him aside. It is honouring him too much to talk about him. But it was horrible that he should be the one to tell you——" She paused and said impulsively, "I am so sorry for you. I know what you must suffer. There was a time when it seemed to me the unpardonable sin—a thing no woman could ever forgive; but I feel sure of this, if you had not heard in this way Lilith would have told you herself on her return to you. You mustn't

think of her as she was when she left you. She has had time to think, and for what we call her sin—you and I are women, too—she has been paying. She is paying now.”

“Oh, you mistake me!” cried Janey, in real distress; “we don’t want her to suffer, we don’t want her to pay! We felt how much more dreadful it must be for her than it could ever be for us; we only want her, papa and I, to feel that there is love that will never reproach or question her waiting for her at home.”

Mary looked at her in wonder, this sister to saints, clad in the bad taste to which poverty, dependent for its wardrobe on the charity of rich relations, must submit. Her face, with that inner radiance and glow, was like an early Botticelli. Mary gave a quick stab of scorn to her own self-complacency. She had thought herself so very good for forgiving and befriending the sinner, and here was one, so much more wronged, forgetting everything but the desire to hide the sin behind the greatness of her love. What would she not have given to make her stammering tongue say :

“How glad Lilith will be to go back with you!”

But alas, and alas, for the frailty of poor human nature! she could not say it. For it sometimes falls that the rarest souls, whose wings and halos almost seem to shimmer through the earthly vestiture, so near are they to heaven, lose, by their very spirituality, their way about the muddy tracks of earth. And it was the common earth upon which Lilith

must walk, her feet a long way yet from the heights up which Janey would have borne her.

"They will never understand each other," was her mournful conviction; "it will be one long misery of mistakes. If she were a little less good, how good she would be! But if I am to be reformed, give me a fellow sinner to do the deed. I wonder if she ever stole the sugar or told a fib in all her blameless years!"

But these were not things that could be said aloud.

"You will need your patience yet," she said, trying to make more easy the path of disappointment. "You will find her changed; but—you won't expect too much—all at once?"

"Everything will come if she will let us love her!"

"Not *everything* perhaps, even then. There are dumb notes in most of us, you know, out of which no response can be got;" but, seeing Janey's dejection, she hastened to add, "Your goodness must indeed call out the best in her, and there *is* good. Give her time! don't expect her to climb too fast, and some day, please God, she will stand by your side yet."

"By *my* side!" said Janey, shrinking as if from a blow, the deep, distressed colour flooding her face. "Ah, you shame me when you say that!"

"I don't want to do that," Mary smiled, and she forthwith put emotions away and became practical.

"Before Lilith comes," she said, "I want you to tell me what plans you have made and where you are staying. I hope you are not settled far off, because we must see you every day."

But it turned out that Janey had not secured a



room at all, trusting with the blind confidence of inexperience that some body would help her out of the difficulty. She had thought she might have to follow Lilith to Schwarzenwald, a village in the moon, for all she knew, and had deemed nothing so important as to keep a clutch upon her luggage, as if in the new air it might suddenly develop legs and walk away.

“And you only arrived this morning!”

“I slept a good deal in the train, and some English people in the carriage showed me where to get breakfast. Then, as I had your address——”

“How tired you must be!” said Mary with compunction. She took her to her own room to wash away the dust of her journey, resolving that if no other bed were available in the house, Janey should take hers.

“It would be sheer, wanton cruelty to send her adrift; you might as well expect a cherub from off a tombstone to be practical,” she said when she paid a flying visit to carry the news to Granny. “Think of her setting out armed with nothing but a few phrases of which she doesn’t know the meaning!”

“I will recommend the Berlitz system to her when I am able to see her,” said Granny, looking pink and pretty among her shawls and pillows. “It is really excellent.”

“And I’ll recommend something to eat forthwith! I wish I hadn’t said lunch was to be at two. She can’t wait till then. Of course she ate all her sandwiches between London and Cologne, and of course

she was too frightened to buy anything on the road. I suppose it's by way of restoring the balance that Nature mostly gives the common-sense to her reprobates."

But when Janey came back without her bonnet her heart warmed to her, as indeed it had lit fires of kindness from the first. She looked much younger, almost pretty, and her timidity wore off a little as she was comforted with tea, and stayed with "*Schnit*." It wore off still more when Mary artfully led her to talk of her home, her father, his parish, and the work they both did there. On this simple theme she could be eloquent.

Mary knitted and listened and found herself sufficiently interested to forget her doubts.

"What a simple, single-hearted creature she is! Lilith must see and appreciate her goodness. She shall be *made* to like her. If only they don't begin all wrong! I wish the first meeting were over."

She lifted her head to look at the clock. It was almost time, even allowing for some delay on account of the bad roads, for Tosh to bring her. He had set out so early.

There, that was a step, a man's foot coming up the uncarpeted stair, hurrying up. How foolish of Tosh to strain his weak ankle!

She glanced at Janey, who was preoccupied with her mild reminiscences, anxious to prepare her. She was sorry for Janey, but she was also a little sorry for herself, for the unexpected encounter could not but have its embarrassments for everybody.

"I think," she said, suddenly inspired, "if you will

excuse me, I will run down and tell Lilith you are here."

"Has she come?" asked Janey, starting nervously.

"I think so. I will go and see."

But she was too late.

As she rose the door was opened without any ceremony of knocking, indeed, with a hurry that made itself felt.

"Why, Tosh," she said with a laugh, "you impetuous person!" But it was John Darnaway who stood on the threshold.

"You!" she exclaimed, the amusement deepening on her face. "So you have found the courage——"

But as he came a step nearer her smile was suddenly frozen. He had an air of disorder, he was breathless with swift running, and seemed to struggle with his voice, as if to make it say what it had come to say, that he might be gone again. But plainer than any words his blanched face spoke disaster.

Janey saw it too, and, shaken with some vague, premonitory fear, her trembling hand sought Mary's.

They faced him together, the woman who was his friend and the stranger he had never seen before, yet whose presence he did not resent, since some intuitive perception demonstrated her right to be there, her right to Mary's strong, supporting clasp as a hapless sharer in this new tragedy.

"What is it?" demanded Mary, in a hoarse, changed voice.

And then, in such fashion as he never could recall, he told them.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### A YEAR LATER

THE snow had ceased to fall, and an army of sweepers had cleared the pavements, so that Munich could walk abroad upon its *Gummischůe* and take coffee with its neighbour.

Mary was among the wayfarers, Mary wrapped in furs, looking too tired to be exhilarated even by the keen, frosty air ; too tired, also, for the business of being entertaining or being entertained. So that when she arrived at Fraũ von Glümer's flat in the Amalienstrasse, she was glad to find no second pair of goloshes reposing under the hat-stand to keep company with her own.

There were times when she felt that the winter, now almost left behind, had laid upon her shoulders a burden greater than they, stout as they were, could bear. It seemed as if fate had picked her up and cast her into the middle of other people's troubles, and given her a portion of the suffering altogether beyond her deserts. A year since, she had neither heard the name nor seen the face of one of those friends with whom during those many months she had agonised and wrestled, fighting their fight with

them, sharing their hope, cheering their despair. For during very many weeks Tosh's existence hung upon a slenderly spun thread, and when capricious Destiny spared her shears it seemed as if with restored life reason must be forfeit.

Perhaps no one understood the sinister significance of this possibility so well as she, who stood apart, and yet so close in sympathy with the suffering boy. Darnaway himself, distraught, fiercely repelling every dark hint of doctor and nurse—sending in frantic haste for advice from London, and, when it came in the shape of a spare and correctly urbane gentleman who refused with the caution of his profession to be hustled into any decided opinion, telegraphing with intemperate wrath for the foremost reputation in Paris,—was a figure to excite pity in any woman's heart.

Mary gave it him in full measure, and patience too; that divine patience that is born in a woman for motherhood and is spent so lavishly on all hapless things. He never realised till afterwards how much he leaned on her, how close woven became the tie between them when nothing but her calm, reasoning good sense, her composure, her steady hand upon the balance of life, could have saved him from entirely breaking down.

"His mother," he would say, walking up and down the room in his distraction. "She gave him to my keeping and, Heaven help her! she will never forgive me in this world if he dies. And—I'll never forgive myself."

But Tosh did not die, though he battled for a great space in the grey waters of Lethe, where the winds chant with one burden and the waves leap to overwhelm; and when he drifted shorewards at last, so spent a wreck of human life was he that it might well seem as if death had tossed him there in very derision, as too poor a thing to take.

The worst lay far enough behind now for Darnaway to have recovered the gaiety of hope, and for Mary to go out on some less aimless errand than the mere taking of a walk, which had been as much a duty as sitting by the patient's bed to release the nurse. But though—in spite of the snow—there was that scent and sense of spring in the air that one snuffs up from the moment the world heaves on its side and prepares to throw off the blankets, it did not touch her soul. Mary could not be gay. The tinkle of the sleigh-bells, the complaisance of smirking officers handling their teams and sunning themselves in the smiles of their grateful companions (the German officer is a god to his feminine environment), the good-humoured cheerfulness of the common folk, coming full-stomached out of the beer-houses; the flower-shops where the riches of Italy make a year-long beauty—nothing moved her either to mirth or interest. The winter's experiences had cut too deep to be erased at a wish.

She was weary even of thinking, of asking the vain question what God meant by it all, and why she should have been chosen to take her share of the mystery and the suffering. She was on her way now to

interfere for the last time with these human destinies and then—and then—to escape into some new world where she would never see or hear of them any more!

She breathed a sigh of relief when, after plodding with feet that had no spring in them up to the first floor, she learned that Hēla was alone.

As she was ushered into the drawing-room, the girl started up from the window seat where she had been reading, with that sense of apprehension that had grown habitual in those weeks of suspense, when nothing changed save for the worse; but Mary's face was only tired, and plain, with the light and sparkle gone out of it.

Hēla's face was itself changed. Her eyes had looked out upon life and had seen the evil and the good of it; they were clear wells of truth still, but the child no longer dwelt behind them.

Mary, looking at her with perhaps some new criticism, found her grown almost beautiful, a little thinner, more finely moulded, with the rounded grace of young womanhood, a little taller, but surely none the less lovable.

"Has she come?" Hēla asked eagerly, drawing her visitor forward and pushing her with gentle authority into a comfortable chair. She knelt to unfasten Mary's boa, and remained kneeling.

"Yes, she has come: John Darnaway insisted on her resting the night at Frankfort, so it was evening before they arrived. She would unpack before going to Tosh, when she heard he was asleep, to find, as she said, a gown that he would know;—and an apron



She is one of the old-fashioned cap and apron mothers. I was afraid she would break down when she saw him, but she didn't, poor brave soul! and when he stirred and woke—there she was sitting by him, looking at him with eyes the marrow of what his were—before——”

“Of what they will be yet again.” Hēla's own were bright with unshed drops.

Mary, who had sunk into a reverie, roused herself.

“It's the end of the second volume,” she said.

“And the third—oh, Mary, the third will surely make up for all!”

“It isn't written so that we can read it yet, and there's no use speculating. We have got to leave it, anyway; there's a time when nothing one can do for a fellow-creature is of any avail. Then, if we're wise, we leave the issue to God. I've come to say goodbye to you, child.”

“Goodbye!”

“Yes, I feel withered. I want to go away and ‘recover greenness.’”

“Spring *is* coming,” said the girl softly.

“For you,” thought Mary, but she had the grace to withhold it from her lips.

“But oh, Mary, if I weren't going too, how much I should miss you! Grandmamma has been so good, so understandingly good—but there is Tante Rachel to think of, too. She has been very patient, considering that letters can't make things real—not in the sense in which we've been living them——”

"Is that your guardian's plan for you—to return to Scotland?"

"It is my plan," she said with a slight, proud lift of her brown head.

"And is it included in his plans to go too?"

"I don't know." In spite of that lifted chin her voice was not quite steady. "He has not told me. I suppose—he is going back to Australia."

"He is coming here first, anyway," said Mary, with a faint flash of the old light in her eyes—"no doubt like me, to say goodbye! And, my child," the raillery died out of her voice, as she laid her hand on Hēla's shoulder, "I think it would be very nice if, for once, you were obedient and acquiescent to any wish of his. He has gone through a good deal, you know, and really—I think he deserves a little kindness at your hands."

"Kindness?" the girl's eyes were clouded as they met the elder woman's. Then suddenly the blood surged up in her face, a great tide of crimson that flowed from neck to temples.

Mary saw the carmine signal, and bent her own tired cheek against the girl's burning one to hide that she had seen it.

"Take your own way of rewarding him," she murmured lightly. "Men are wonderfully humble and grateful when they get what they want!"

She knew that almost before she could get round the corner and into the long, dull street, he would be upon her steps. How grey was the monotonous

outline of tall dwellings, the greyer for the snow upon roof and roadway, but they were lighting the electric lamps already, and the white, swinging globes made a fictitious day. "But he will get the sun's benediction," she thought, for the house she had left faced the west.

At the door of it he met the ninth Muse whom it was his fancy to call Melpomene, left forlornly behind under grandmamma's care when the eight were scattered. She had a sedate "Miss" of her own, with whom she had been walking in a mute rebellion which became active at the sight of Herr John.

She flung herself upon him.

"The grandmamma is *nicht zu hause*," she explained. "She is bringing the day to with the Princess. There is only the Hēla upstairs. But *ich selbst*, I will mount with you"—defiance was hurled from her eyes at Miss, who had primly stepped aside—"we will amuse ourselves together."

"Melpomene," said Darnaway, "you are not often the bearer of good news and you deserve to be rewarded. I saw in the window of the Brienner café a chocolate box which surpasses all the chocolate boxes in Munich for loveliness. If Miss Fraser"—he turned courteously to the lady, "will kindly take you there she will allow you to have coffee with her, perhaps——"

"All that *Geld!*" said the insensitive Melpomene, examining the conclusion of his sentence as it lay in her woollen-clad palm. "*Aber*, it must be a *herrlich* box——"

"I would recommend haste, in case some one else admires it," said Darnaway, with a blush for his clumsy diplomacy.

"Why did Herr John give me so much money?" demanded Luischen of her governess, when she had pondered the matter for the length of a block.

"Because men are fools!" retorted that lady shortly.

"Herr John isn't a fool," said Luischen in her decided little voice. "When I grow up, I am going to be *verlobt* to him."

"You'll need to be quick, then," said the governess dryly.

Yes, little Melpomene, quicker than your big German feet will ever trip, for while you are still but half-way to the café your Herr John is the happiest man in Germany—he would himself, less modest, say in the world!

He went armed with a letter from Rachel, argumentative, reproachful, finally stooping to entreat, but he never used that strong weapon.

And strangely enough, when Hēla said "Yes" to a question she was asked, she found herself pledged, neither quite knew how, to go with him, not to Scotland, but to Australia.

She gave him his reward as simply as he asked for it. They had passed together through deep waters, and the sound, still in their ears, of those whelming waves, made an undernote even to their joy.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

More than a year later, Mary sat in her own drawing-room, in her own spacious and comfortable London house, entertaining a visitor.

As hostess Mary shone ; as woman (in spite of her thirty-five years) she also again shone in her trim becoming dress, health, content and brightness in her face, by the side of her ineffective guest, who gave the impression of a blurred and spoiled negative.

Janey Shore had come on a visit which Mary privately intended should be a long one, and she wore the mourning put on for Lilith, and grown rusty now with unavailing grief for her father.

Her patient dejection gave way to a little spring of interest when Mary began to impart bits of news from a foreign letter she had just received.

"The Darnaways are at Macoomba," she said. "They have had a regal reception, according to Hēla. She says nobody ought to be allowed to say he has lived till he has seen the Australian Bush.—Tosh is in India still.—If he doesn't go home before John and Hēla come over again—you know they've made a solemn promise to visit Scotland every second year while Mrs. Andrew Darnaway lives—Hēla says they will go themselves to look him up."

Janey gasped. This scudding about the globe took her breath away.

"Why doesn't he go home?" she asked. "I should have thought it so natural—with such a mother."

"He seems to feel the fascination of the East. There are times when even a man's mother can only

send him away from her, Janey, if she's brave enough—and wise enough."

Janey put two slender, worn hands over her eyes.

"If she hadn't died that way!" she said, with the sudden passion of a very gentle nature. "I know it's wicked, but though I pray against the feeling, it's no use. I seem to have grown altogether wicked since papa died—but—to let me come too late, and to kill her in that way—it seems so like—retribution!"

Janey was at the place where Mary's feet had halted a year before. She retraced her steps to stand there again beside her.

"I know what you feel," she said. "I felt like that myself, once, but it is disloyal, because it makes God such a poor creature—small and vindictive and revengeful; it credits Him with a spite the worst of us wouldn't show to a neighbour. That the river should claim Lilith because in a moment of unfaithfulness she let the sea take Lilla, might seem poetic justice in a heathen drama, but it couldn't have any place in God's plan. Put Lilla out of mind altogether, and is there anything inconceivable in such an accident? It's only in our stupidity that we connect the two. God doesn't defend us against the mischances of life: He uses them when it seems best to Him to take us to Himself. The river was just His road, by which Lilith went from a world that was too difficult to one where love and repentance will do their perfect work.—It *was* too difficult," she added to herself, after a pause.

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"And Tosh?" asked Janey tremulously, shaken with the thought of her own daring. "Tosh, who loved her, who did no wrong—he is left in the difficult world."

"Tosh, poor Tosh!" Mary's face kindled and softened. "Some men might build a new happiness on the ruins of the old without being unfaithful to the past. Those are the happy people, Janey, those who can light their candles when the sun goes down; but if Tosh isn't one of them—and I'm afraid he isn't—I'm not sure that it isn't an impertinence on our part to pity him. '*Entbehren sollst du, sollst entbehren*,' is no such unenviable rule of life for those who can live up to it."

"But that's Goethe, Janey," she broke off to laugh, "and I'm afraid you have very little respect for that delightful heathen! Will you not go and put on your bonnet, dear? I have ordered the carriage at a quarter-to-five, and Granny Dewar, who is the soul of punctuality, will set alight the spirit-kettle at the stroke of the hour. Boiled tea is another of your dislikes, Janey; I think you view it with even more distrust than you do Goethe. You see I've mastered two of your prejudices already," she checked them on her fingers; "by the time you and I have voyaged to Australia to visit John and Hēla, I shall know them all!"





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